

vol. [13]

REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY
الشعر اوان

فواطـر

المجلد [13]



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

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the chapter of

al-Isra'

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

Introduction:

If we consider the conclusion of chapter *an-Nahl* carefully, we find that it is a natural introduction for what occurs in chapter *al-Isra'*.⁽¹⁾ We observe agreeability and harmony in the arrangement of these two chapters; *an-Nahl* ends by clarifying the principle of 'reciprocating punishment with its like,' after which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is commanded to remain patient as the chapter elucidated the reward of those who adhered to patience and thereby removed the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* from the distress caused by the plots of the disbelievers.

From this, we uncover that indeed, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would soon encounter events that would require patience, composure and equanimity. It is as if these instructions were fortresses of faith, fortifying and preparing him for the coming events that would unfold in the chapter of *al-Isra'*. They are equivalent to signposts, signalling the approaching difficulties

(1) *The chapter of Al-Isra': it is the 17th chapter in the arrangement of the Quranic text. It contains 111 verses and was revealed in Mecca with the exception of three verses:*

'And [remember, O Muhammad], when We told you, "Indeed, your Lord has encompassed the people." And We did not make the sight which We showed you except as a trial for the people.' (al-Isra': 60)

'And indeed, they were about to drive you from the land to evict you therefrom. And then [when they do], they will not remain [there] after you, except for a little.' (al-Isra': 60)

'And say, "My Lord, cause me to enter a sound entrance and to exit a sound exit and grant me from Yourself a supporting authority.' (al-Isra': 60)

The Quran is divided into 30 parts, and chapter Al-Isra' begins at the 15th part of the Quran, and it also has some additional names, such as chapter Subhan and chapter Banu Israil, to name a couple of them.

that lie ahead so that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would not be taken unaware or caught off guard.

This fortification that occurs during the ending of the chapter of *an-Nahl* is very similar to the means we employ to preserve the soundness of our physical make-up and wellness when we fear disease. We call this process vaccinating against disease: the body derives fortification from this vaccine in the event of a viral attack.

In this manner did the True Lord *Glorified is He* give His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* these fortifications so that he could face the coming tumultuous times and challenges with patience and poise, assured that Allah *Glorified is He* would never disown nor forsake him. For Allah *Glorified is He* has never abandoned a messenger after dispatching him, even if the people desert him and even if this world, for all of its expansiveness, becomes constrained for him, he finds refuge in the accompaniment of Allah.

In the truest sense, adversity did befall the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the nadir of these trials being the deaths of his uncle Abu Taleb and his wife Khadija *may Allah be pleased with them* within the same year. It was the harshness of that year that led the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to call it 'The year of sadness.'

With the demise of his uncle, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* lost the external protection that defended him against the aggression of the idolaters and warded off the notables of Quraysh. With the passing of his wife, he lost his internal protection and safe haven to which he would retreat. It was she who had calmed and soothed him during the first revelatory experience and who ultimately explained to him with insight that without doubt, he had witnessed the signs of prophethood in the cave and that Allah would never forsake him. 'You honour your relatives, aid the one in straits, assist the orphan, and help the doers of good,' she told him⁽¹⁾.

A year of sadness indeed, one in which he lost his inner and outer sanctuaries at once. In which direction could he now turn? No longer sensing

(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his (*Sahih*) [3] in the Book of Early Revelation from the narration of 'Aisha *may Allah be pleased with her*

security in Mecca, his thoughts shifted to the people of Taif. Perhaps he would find safety and security among them; however, he was like someone seeking relief from intense heat with fire, undeniably. They caused him great harm. They threw stones at him until his noble foot began to bleed profusely, and they incited the children and fools amongst them to chase him. So, he left there melancholic and dejected, again returning to Mecca, and with the exception of Mut'am ibn 'Adi, he had found no one willing to support him.

Indeed, we know that the conclusion of the chapter of *an-Nahl* is appropriately positioned. It is as though, the True Lord *Glorified is He* was instructing His prophet: 'Truly the world with all of its expansiveness has converged upon you until your very soul has become a straightened place; nevertheless, your refuge is Allah. He will show you that the unwillingness of the land and misfortunes that you have witnessed will all be exchanged for blessed salutations. This lies within the heavenly reception I will extend unto you, after what you experienced in Mecca and Taif: '...and do not be in distress over what they conspire. Indeed, Allah is with those who are conscious of Him and those who are doers of good.' The Night Journey and Ascension took place to demonstrate the heavenly election of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* after the abuse he encountered from human beings. But before He issued His celestial invite to Prophet Muhammad, He altered the balance of creation for him. For He *Glorified is He* said:

سُبْحَنَ الَّذِي أَسْرَى بِعَبْدِهِ لَيْلًا مِّنَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَا
الَّذِي بَارَكْنَا حَوْلَهُ لِنُرِيَهُ مِن آيَاتِنَا إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ

**Glory to Him who made His servant travel by night from the
sacred place of worship to the furthest place of worship,
whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him some of
Our signs: He alone is the All Hearing, the All Seeing [1]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 1)**

The True Lord *Glorified is He* opened this chapter with His saying "the Exalted" because it discusses an occurrence of tremendous magnitude, squarely outside the normal chain of events. It means: the absolute Exaltedness of

Allah (Exalted above). There has never been a likeness or similarity to Him amongst His creation—neither in essence, for there is no essence like His essence, nor in attributes, for there exists no attributes like His attributes. Further, not in action because the actions of His creatures do not resemble His actions whatsoever.

So if it was said to you ‘Allah exists and you exist,’ Allah is exalted above His existence being like your existence. This is because your existence sprang from non-existence; hence it is not essential to your being. As for His *Glorified is He* existence, it does not emanate from non-existence, it is essential to His being.

Therefore, there is no similitude for His essence or any likeness amid the essences of His creation. Likewise, if it were repeated to you, ‘You possess the faculty of hearing and Allah also possesses the faculty of hearing,’ Again, Allah is exalted above His hearing resembling your hearing. Just as if it were said to you, ‘Allah wields the ability to act and you too are capable of action.’ Once more, Allah is exalted above His action being like your action.

Consequently, the meaning of ‘the Exalted’ is equivalent to saying, ‘I am awe-struck by the might of Allah.’ Accordingly, it was put forward in order to indicate that indeed, the coming discussion pertains to a matter clearly outside the realm of human ability. As such, by no means should you, upon learning of it, reject it or say, ‘How could this occur?’ Rather, Allah is exalted above there being any resemblance between His action and the action of human beings. Therefore, if it is said to you, ‘To be sure, He took His Prophet during the hours of darkness from Mecca to Jerusalem in the span of a single night, in spite of the fact that the same journey would have taken his contemporaries a month’s time travelling upon the sturdiest camels, you should in no way disbelieve.

Your Lord did not say, ‘Muhammad journeyed by night’, rather, He took him. Consequently, the action is not attributed to Muhammad; it is attributed to Allah. And as long as the action is attributed to Allah, it is not amenable to the standard measurements of time with which you are familiar. Allah’s actions are not limited by anything.

If we carefully consider ‘the Exalted’ we discover that its usage is reserved for matters that limit the role of logic, and attempts to realize them leave minds befuddled—wondrous things. Like His saying: ‘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).

From the pair of male and female does the process of proliferation begin in plant life and humanity alike? Modern science explained His saying: '...and from that which they do not know.' Expressing the point we have now arrived at, with breakthroughs in electricity and the atomic world, for they are composed of the negative and the positive which are equivalent to the male and the female. For this reason He *Glorified is He* said: 'And of all things We created two mates; perhaps you will remember.' (*adh-Dhariyat*: 49)

In that connection, He *Glorified is He* mentioned: 'Extol, then, Allah's limitless glory when you enter upon the evening hours, and when you rise at morn' (*ar-Rum*: 17). Whoever peruses creation at the rising of the sun and its setting, and witnesses how darkness is illumined and light is dimmed can only halt in front of this verse and say. 'Exalted is Allah.' He *Glorified is He* also mentioned: 'Exalted is He who has made [all] this subservient to our use—since [but for Him,] we would not have been able to attain it.' (*az-Zukhruf*: 13) 'Exalted is He' indicates continuance and permanence. As though this suggests that Allah's exaltedness was established before there was anyone to exalt Him. Just as it is said in respect to creation, Allah is the Creator and that was an element of His description before He ever created anything.

Likewise, if you were to say so and so is a poet, he was a poet before he composed a poem for if he were not a poet, he could not compose a poem. In view of that, Allah's Exaltedness was established before there was anyone to exalt Him *Glorified is He*. Fittingly, when one who exalts Him, the form of expression is transformed from a designation to a 'describing action.' He *Glorified is He* stated: 'All that is in the heavens and all that is on earth Exalted Allah.' (*al-Hashr*: 1)

Did all that the heavens and earth contain glorify Allah and then cease and remain silent? Not in the slightest; on the contrary: 'All that is in the heavens and all that is on earth exalts Allah.' (*al-Jumu'a*: 1) Perpetual and uninterrupted, this has not changed at all, and His glorification is established. All created beings of past and present glorify Him. So, do not be reluctant to glorify and exalt your Lord, O you who are accountable for your actions. He *the Exalted*

says: 'Extol your Lord's name, the All-Highest' (*al-A'la*: 1). As for His saying: 'He who took His Servant by night,' the True Lord *Glorified is He* took his servant by night. Again, the action is attributed to Allah *Glorified is He* not to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. As a consequence, do not survey the action according to the conventional measures of human beings. Exalt and elevate the action of Allah from your action. The people of Mecca received the news of this occasion with denial: 'How can this be, when the same journey takes us a month's time travelling upon sturdy camels?' they hastily offered. However, the way they framed their denial was disingenuous, for the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not claim to have made the journey himself, rather he said, 'I was taken.'

It is well known that covering distances requires an amount of time inversely proportioned to the amount of energy expended. As a result of the inverse relation of time to energy, if we wanted to travel to Alexandria, the time the journey would take would vary according to our means of transport—walking or travelling by car, or by plane. As we increased the amount of energy being expended, the amount of time would decrease.

So, what do you think if the action and its speed are attributed to Allah? If the action was performed by Allah, it did not require any time! If someone were to say, for instance, 'In light of the fact that Allah was responsible for the action and it did not require any time at all, why did not He conclude the Night Journey in the span of an eye blink, why did it require a night?' We respond by stating that there is a stark difference between the distances covered within Allah's Law and the sights that were shown to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* along the way. For he witnessed sites, conversed with people, and beheld verses and wonders, this is what consumed time.

On the question of the Night Journey and the Ascension, Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'I took my servant by night.' So whosoever desires to view the possibility of such an affair with disbelief or reject its occurrence, let him deny the capability of Allah, the Commissioner of the act, not Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Nonetheless, how did the disbelievers of Mecca fail to comprehend this? From the disbelievers of Mecca — in their denunciation of the Prophet

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a liar in the case of the Night Journey and the Ascension — we acquire a timely rebuttal against some of our contemporaries, who are being led by their limited intellects and shallow faith, heedlessly plunge into interpretations of this matter. They seek to instruct us with ill-conceived ideas for which Allah has sent down no authority.

Some of them, we hear saying, ‘The Night Journey was a dream,’ or ‘it was an out-of-body experience’. We must question the proponents of such ideas, ‘If Muhammad had informed his people: I saw Jerusalem in a vision, would they have declared him a liar?’ Or for that matter, if he had said, ‘Indeed, my soul journeyed last night until it reached Jerusalem.’ Would they have disavowed his truthfulness? Does anyone deny the possibility of dreams or out-of-body experiences?

Hence, their disavowal and rejection of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* establishes the Night Journey as an actual journey completed by the Messenger of Allah in body and soul. It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* preserved the sceptical stance of yesterday’s doubters in order to respond to the sceptics of today. As for His saying: ‘His servant,’ when used, the word ‘servant’, it encompasses the body and soul. This is what is indicated by its usage, so it is not possible that the soul is being exclusively intended here.

In any event, why did the True Lord *Glorified is He* choose to describe His Messenger Muhammad in this precise manner? We answer by stating that, indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* enacted a general law in creation for the benefit of mankind. Although rare, at times this natural law or normative code may be broken—as a miracle—for that exclusive set of individuals whom Allah wishes to privilege among creation. It is as if the word ‘*servant*’ is an aspect of the Night Journey which implies: He took him by night because he sincerely actualized his servitude to Allah.

In as much as he is sincere in his realization of servitude to his Lord, as His servant, he deserves distinction and preferment to others. The Night Journey and the Ascension were well-deserved gifts from Allah for His Messenger Muhammad in exchange for the sincerity with which he realized his servitude to Him.

The difference between servitude to Allah and that to human beings is that it contains honour and dignity for the former. By virtue of his servitude, the servant reaps the bounty of his Master. One poet said:

And from that which has increased my honour and dignity
So that I am nearly able to tread upon heaven
Is my inclusion in your saying 'O my servants'
And that my prophet, Ahmad you've made

As for human beings' servitude of one another, it contains inferiority, subjugation, and slight. The master consumes the harvest of the servant's effort and prevents him from reaping the fruits of his labour. As such, one who reads the verses of Quran with avidity will recognize that, indeed, the concept of servitude is only used in places that express loftiness. For example: 'Exalted is He Who took His servant by night!' Or His saying: 'and that when the Servant of Allah stood up' (*al-Jinn*: 19).

In terms of honour and dignity, it is enough to consider the following: Whenever you desire a meeting with your Master, you are at liberty to set the terms. The only thing you are obliged to do is perform the ritual ablution and make a firm intention to meet, which is expressed by saying, '*Allahu akbar*' (Allah is the Greatest). After which you are in the accompaniment of Allah *Glorified is He* in a meeting in which you set the time, the place, and the duration. Furthermore, you even get to choose the topic of discussion. You are in the presence of your Lord, in a meeting that will only be adjourned when you decide. One poet expresses this so well:

There is enough nobility for me in being a servant
For without appointment, I enjoy my lord's reception
In His holiness indeed, He is mightier than I
But I meet Him at times and places of my selection

What do you think the scenario would be like if you attempted to schedule a meeting with one of the world's more prominent figures? How cumbersome and laborious would it be for you! How many aids and guards would you

need to get through? Finally, even if you endured all of that, you still would not be able to select the time, place, or topic of your discussion nor anything else for that matter.

The ethical standard of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was influenced by the standard of Allah. This was so to such an extent that when someone shook his hand, greeting him, he would not withdraw his hand until the other party first withdrew their hand.⁽¹⁾

'By night' The True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to re-emphasize this. Perhaps someone might ask, 'Why did the Night Journey not take place during the day?' We respond: The Night Journey occurred at night so that it could remain an unseen miracle; those who believe in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* believe in it. Had he travelled during the day, the people would have seen his departure and return. In which case, it would have been a perceptible affair; witnessed with the physical eye and thus would not necessitate belief in the unseen.

For this reason, when Abu Jahl received news of the Night Journey, he hurried to the mosque, announcing; 'Now your companion is claiming to have been taken by night from Mecca to Jerusalem.' Some people fidgeted with their hands in disbelief, while others outright denied it. In fact, some people even became apostates.

Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* on the other hand, received the news in a manner befitting the believer and affirmer of the truth. This occasion was the source of his being granted the nickname (As-Siddiq), and it was during it that he uttered those famous words, 'If he said it, then it must be true.'⁽²⁾

(1) *Related on the authority of Anas may Allah be pleased with him he said, 'Never in all my life have I seen a man take The Messenger of Allah by the hand, except that the Messenger of Allah did not release his hand until the man had released his.'* [cited by Abu l-Shaykh Asbahani in (Akhlaq An-Nabi) (p. 29)]

(2) *Cited by Bayhaqi in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa (al-Baqara: 361) on the authority of 'Aisha may Allah be pleased with her that she said, 'When the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was carried by night to the Most Remote Mosque, people arose that following morning talking about it. Some people who prior to this occasion were believers became apostates. The people then carried the affair to Abu Bakr may Allah be pleased with him. They questioned, 'Do you know that your companion is now claiming to have been carried to Jerusalem last night?' He responded, 'Did he say that?' 'Yes,' they =*

His principle criterion of judgment then was: Did the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* say it? As long as he said it, it was true. In respect to Abu Bakr as-Siddiq *may Allah be pleased with him* this was an axiom. He then asserted, 'In fact, we attest to his truthfulness in a matter more astonishing than this; we believe that he is informed by the heavens (revelation), so why would we fail to affirm his honesty in this affair?'

Accordingly, the True Lord *Glorified is He* made this a critical test in faith and an examination of certainty. In order that only those possessing firm faith and unwavering certainty would remain in the company of the Prophet Muhammad, the others, of course, being weeded out. For this reason, He stated in another verse: 'And we did not make the sight which we showed you except as a trial for the people.' (*al-Isra'*: 60) This is the second evidence that the Night Journey was not a dream. For the Night Journey is not a trial and a test unless it takes place in reality, as opposed to being a dream. There is no rejection or difference of opinion among people with regards to dreams.

Nevertheless, why was the Night Journey referred to as a vision within sleep? Why did He not say a physical vision? The Quranic exegetes have mentioned: Vision, when encompassing a wondrous sight becomes as though it is being beheld in a dream state.

Much has been said by the scholars in reference to the Night Journey: was it in body or spirit? Was it a dream or was he awake? Was it from the Inviolable Mosque or the home of Um-Hani?⁽¹⁾ We do not disagree with the fact that there is diversity of opinion; we would, however, like to clarify those mutual approaches.

= rejoined. Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* then said, 'If he did in fact say this, then it is true.' They asked in disbelief, 'You mean you believe that he went to Jerusalem last night and returned before dawn?' 'Yes,' he said, then offering, 'Indeed, I believe something more far-flung than that. I believe that he receives revelation from the heavens in the mornings and the evenings.' This is why he was named Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *may Allah be pleased with him*. In this form, it was recorded by Al-Hakim in his *Mustadrak* [3/62-63]. He said concerning it, 'Although Al-Bukhari and Muslim did not narrate it, its chain of narrators is sound.'

(1) Um Hani is Um Hani bint Abu Taleb Al-Hashimiyya, the paternal cousin of the Prophet Muhammad. It is said that her name is Fakhita or Fatima or Hind although the first name is the most widely known. And she was the wife of Habira ibn 'Amr Al-Makhzumi (*Al-Isaba fi Tamyiz As-Sahaba*) [8/287].

In regard to whether the Night Journey only took place in spirit or within body, we have already clarified the correct approach; it was within both body and spirit. This is the realm of miracle. If it were exclusively in spirit, it would not have been miraculous and hence the disbelievers of Mecca would not have denied it.

As for those who maintain that the Night Journey was a dream, it is incumbent that we recognize that Prophet Muhammad's first revelation was a true dream, because the Prophet never witnessed a dream except that it came to pass like daybreak.⁽¹⁾ The Prophet Muhammad's dreams are not like our dreams. Rather, his dreams are truthful and must be actualized. This is similar to what took place when Allah desired to show him a vision of The Victory. (*al-Fath*) Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Certainly has Allah showed to His Messenger the vision in truth. You will surely enter al-Masjid al-Haram, if Allah wills, in safety, with your heads shaved and [hair] shortened, not fearing [anyone].' (*al-Fath*: 27)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* relayed this news to his companions and when they were rebuffed by the disbelievers at Hudaybiya, the companions asked the Messenger of Allah, 'Did you not inform us of our entrance into the Inviolable Mosque?' He replied, 'However, I did not say this year.'⁽²⁾

This is why they term this vision 'The dream of familiarity.' When the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would witness something in a dream, and then it took place in reality, he would not be surprised by it because he was already familiar with it. If, when he saw dreams, they would come to pass like the break of dawn, this dream, too, would occur in reality. So, he witnessed the vision again as a reminder of the first dream, with which he was intimately familiar.

(1) On the authority of 'Aisha may Allah be pleased with her she said, 'The first revelation that began the mission of the Prophet Muhammad was the true dream. He never witnessed a dream except that it came to pass like daybreak.' narrated by Al-Bukhari in his (*Sahih*) [3/3392] *Kitab Bad'Al-Wahy*.

(2) Ibn Kathir adduced this in his exegetical work [4/201] with this wording: 'On the authority of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab, he said to Allah's Messenger Muhammad, 'Did you not inform us that we would approach the Holy House and circumambulate it?' He responded, 'Did I tell you that you would reach it this year?' 'No,' said 'Umar. The Prophet Muhammad then said, 'Then you will reach it and circumambulate it.'

As a result, whoever says that the Night Journey was a dream finds our response: Correct, it was a 'dream of familiarity' that was actualized. This leaves us with first, 'the dream of familiarity,' second, 'the vision that reminds of blessing;' and thirdly, the occurrence of the event in reality. In this manner, we satisfy all sides of the debate surrounding the issue of whether the Night Journey occurred in a dream or a wakeful state.

In fact, even after the occurrence of the Night Journey, the true dream remained a type of consolation for the Prophet Muhammad. Each time the vicissitudes of fate bore heavily upon him, Allah *Glorified is He* would show him what would take place in order to demonstrate the heavenly and earthly receptions awaiting Him *peace and blessings be upon him*. The Messenger of Allah would be inured to the hardship he would encounter.

As for he who says the Night Journey began at the home of Um Hani. This also is not a contentious issue because the home of Um Hani was attached to the place of circumambulation within the Inviolable Mosque; the place of circumambulation is considered a section of the Mosque.

In the final analysis, there is no reason to doubt or dispute this miraculous affair. Indeed, the action was commissioned by the True Lord *Glorified is He* and its occasion was narrated to us by Him, so there is no room for disputation.

His saying: '...from al-Masjid al-Haram to al-Masjid al-Aqsa.' The al-Masjid al-Haram refers to the House of Allah – the Majestic *Ka'ba*. It is named so to reflect that within its precincts; some things that are normally lawful inside other mosques are forbidden there. Additionally, we refer to every place consecrated for the worship of Allah as a (*masjid*). Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'The mosques of Allah are only to be maintained by those who believe in Allah.' (*at-Tawba*: 18)

The Inviolable Mosque, though, is different from the others. Indeed, it is the House of Allah by His own choice. Other places of worship are also the Houses of Allah, but by the selection of the creatures of Allah. For this reason, the House of Allah chosen by Allah is the direction of prayer for the Houses of Allah chosen by Allah's creatures.

What is intended by the word (*masjid*) is the place in which we prostrate or a place that is suitable for prayer, as is mentioned in the Prophetic tradition,

'The whole of the Earth has been purified for me and made a place of prayer.'⁽¹⁾ The import here is that it is suitable for prayer.

Nevertheless, we must distinguish the place of prayer consecrated and specifically designated as a house of worship from an area in which it is suitable to pray and engage life's duties. The labourer can pray in his factory and the farmer can pray in the field because these places are suitable for prayer and the engagement of life's responsibilities.

As for the (*masjid*), its sole purpose is prayer or some other devotional act, such as explaining a verse of Quran, clarifying a ruling of the Sacred Law, reciting the Quran, etc. It is not permitted to engage in worldly transactions in the mosque.

This explains why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* upon seeing a man announcing his lost property in the mosque, exclaimed, 'May Allah not return it to you!'⁽²⁾ 'He also said to someone sitting in the mosque completing a transaction, 'May Allah make your transaction devoid of His blessing.'⁽³⁾

This is only because the mosque is specifically designated for acts of devotion and obedience; it is the place in which the servant meets his Lord *Glorified is He*. As such, by no means should you occupy yourself with worldly affairs within its quarters, for you already spend enough time and money attempting to secure them.

(1) *On the authority of Jabir ibn 'Abdullah may Allah be pleased with him the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said, 'I have been given five things that weren't given to anyone before me: my adversaries have been made to fear me at all times; the earth has been purified for me and made a place of prayer, so that wherever a man from my nation finds himself during the time of prayer he is able to pray; the spoils of war have been made lawful for me and they were not made lawful for anyone before me; I have been given the right of intercession; and whereas every other prophet was sent to his people, I have been sent to all people.'* Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his (*Sahih*) [335] and Muslim in his (*Sahih*) [521].

(2) *Narrated by Muslim in his (Sahih) [568] Kitab Al-Masjid from the narration of Abu Hurayra, who said that the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Whoever hears someone announcing his lost property in the mosque should say, "May Allah not return it to you." Indeed, the mosques were not built for this purpose.'*

(3) *On the authority of Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said, 'If you see someone buying or selling in the mosque, say to them, "May Allah make your business unprofitable."' Narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his (Sunnan) [1321]. He said concerning it hasan gharib.*

Additionally, a place of worship is not referred to as a mosque unless it is a freestanding structure—from the ground to the sky. Its soil is considered the mosque and what is above it is also considered the mosque. It stands entirely apart from places in which worldly benefit is derived. This is like someone who builds a mosque at the base of a residential property. What was his objective when he designated this as a place of prayer: Is your intention solely for Allah? Or do you intend to secure a worldly gain?

Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And [He revealed] that the mosques are for Allah, so do not invoke with Allah anyone.’ (*al-Jinn*: 18)

The likes of this place are not referred to as mosques because it does not fulfil all of the relevant criteria of being a mosque. It is attached to a residential dwelling in which speech that is inconsistent with the sanctity of the mosque takes place. Furthermore, because this is out of step with the inviolability of the prayer, offering prayer in a place like this is like offering prayer anywhere else. This is why it is unlawful for a non-Muslim aircraft carrier to hover above Mecca, because the air above the sacred precincts is also sacred.

As for Allah’s saying ‘*Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa*,’ it refers to the house of worship at Jerusalem. Allah’s saying: ‘...whose surroundings We have blessed.’ Blessing is for something to be given fruit in measure, above and beyond that which was hoped from it, or above that which was believed could amount from it. This is like food that is considered enough for two sufficing five. You would say that food contained blessing, hence the saying of the True Lord: ‘...whose surroundings We have blessed.’ This is a proof of exceeding amounts of blessing. For if Allah *Glorified is He* granted the immediate vicinity of the Most Remote Mosque blessing, then the blessing within the mosque itself is even more intense. This is similar to saying, ‘Those living around so and so are experiencing blessing.’ The corollary is that so and so himself is experiencing more blessing. Nonetheless, what kind of blessing did Allah grant the immediate vicinity of the Most Remote Mosque?

Allah blessed the sacred precincts of the Most Remote Mosque with worldly blessings and religious blessings. Worldly blessings in the sense that he made the land in its vicinity fertile and arable it contained gardens and

orchards that yielded various types of fruit. This was a divine bestowal from which believer and disbeliever alike could enjoy.

As for religious blessings, they are exclusively for the believers. These blessings are represented in Jerusalem being the land of the divine Messages and the cradle of the Prophets. Its land had been made redolent by the feet of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jesus, Moses, Zechariah, and John, the Baptist *peace be upon them*. Upon it, angels descended and revelations were sent down.

‘To show him of our signs’ this is tantamount to saying that the underlying purpose of the Night Journey from Mecca to Jerusalem was to show the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* Our verses. Allah *Glorified is He* possesses numerous signs. Among them are the manifests, which are witnessed by all humankind as conveyed by His saying: ‘Now among His signs are the night and the day.’ (*Fussilat*: 37) ‘And among His signs are the ships that sail like [floating] mountains through the seas.’ (*ash-Shura*: 32)

Allah *Glorified is He* desired to grant His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* exclusive access by showing him the signs of the unseen realm which had not been witnessed by anyone prior to him. This happened so that he could see the heavenly reception awaiting him and witness his station with his Lord, who had proclaimed to him: ‘...and do not be in distress over what they conspire,’ because you are in the spaciousness of your Lord’s bestowal. If the people on earth hold you in contempt, Heaven’s people in the highest realm celebrate your mention. If you are constrained among creatures, you are accommodated by the Creator.

As for His saying: ‘Indeed, He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing.’ Of course, this refers to the True Lord *Glorified is He*. The mention of the All Hearing and the All Seeing are directed toward whom? This appears in the conclusion of the verse of the Night Journey which clarified that the True Lord *Glorified is He* made the Night Journey a consolation for the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* after the humiliation he experienced at the hands of the idolaters. It is as though a battle had ensued between the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and the disbelievers, with both sides making decisive statements and actions.

Consequently, it is possible that the meaning of All-Hearing is directed toward the statements of the Messenger Muhammad and the All Seeing toward his actions. His people had persecuted him, denounced him as a liar, and exiled him to Taif. Its inhabitants, though, proved to be more hard-hearted than their brothers in Mecca. Thus, he returned dejected and bloodied, and the supplication he offered was as follows: 'O' Allah, I place before you my powerlessness, my lack of ploy, and my insignificance before men. 'O' Most Merciful of those who show mercy, You are The Lord of the disempowered and You are my Lord. So unto whom will You entrust my affair? Perhaps, a distant stranger who will deal harshly with me or an enemy who will gain an advantage over me? If You are not angry with me I do not care. However, Your favour contains more vastness for me. I am in need of the light of Your face, with which darkness is illumined. All is well in the life of this world and the Hereafter as long as Your anger has not descended upon me and I am not engulfed in Your wrath. It is for You to delay until You please. There is no power nor might save by You.'⁽¹⁾ Allah hears His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and sees his actions. Even in the most trying circumstances, *he peace and blessings be upon him* remained dedicated to prayer. In fact, while returning from Taif, he gave a servant that he came across a bunch of grapes. After conversing with him about prophesy, *he peace and blessings be upon him* said, "You are from the land of Jonah, the Prophet of Allah."⁽²⁾

The alternative meaning, however, offers: Allah hears the statements of the idolaters when they denigrate the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*

(1) Adduced by Ibn Hisham in *As-Sirat an-nabawiyya* (the *Quran*, 2/419,420]. Also *Al-Bayhaqi in (Dalail An-Nubuwwa) (Al-Baqara: 415).*

(2) The name of this slave is 'Addas, he was a young, Christian man. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him: 'You are from the people of which land 'O' Addas, and what is your religion?' He said, 'I am a Christian from the land of Nineveh.' The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* then commented, 'The town of Jonah *peace be upon him* the righteous man.' 'Addas then responded, 'How do you know of Jonah, the son of Mata? That is my brother; he was a prophet and I am a prophet.' 'Addas then pledged his allegiance to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and kissed his head, hands and feet.' [Ibn Hisham, (*As-Sirat An-Nabawiyya*) 2/421]

declaring him a liar and scowling at him. And Allah sees their actions when they harm him (The Prophet Muhammad), pelting him with stones.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* displayed the occurrence of the Night Journey within this verse cosily. He mentioned its point of departure: The Inviolable Mosque. He mentioned its destination: The Most Remote Mosque. Then, in between the point of departure and the destination, He mentioned the term signs. This is a summary in the truest sense.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then came to exhaustively detail this summary for us. He mentioned the verses that he witnessed. If the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* had not explained to us what he witnessed of Allah's verses, he would have left us to question: Where are these verses? The Quran then brings together for us the fundamental elements of Prophet Muhammad's explanation: 'For, behold, it is for Us to gather it [in your heart,] and to cause it to be read [as it ought to be read]. Thus, when We recite it, follow its wording, and then, behold, it will be for Us to make its meaning clear.' (*al-Qiyama*: 17-19)

As a result, the portrayal of the Night Journey as it exists in the souls of the believers must find completion in Prophet Muhammad's commentary—which is to be found in the Prophetic Hadith about the Night Journey—concerning the matter.

Nonetheless, the sceptics and those of weak faith probe the Prophetic Hadiths seeking a discrepancy in order to reject the narrations of what the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* witnessed and asked the Angel Gabriel *peace and blessings be upon him* about.

The critical point of their rejection being: If these events are to take place in the Hereafter, how can they be viewed by Prophet Muhammad?

We respond to them by saying: Indeed, your ability to understand the power Allah wields in originating creation is severely limited. Creation is not originated in this manner. On the contrary it was originated with His eternal command. We present the following analogy in hope of added clarity: Imagine if you wanted to build a home. Of course, you would go to an architect and request a blueprint. If you were in favourable circumstances, you would say: 'Make

me a model of the home,' upon which he would construct a miniature model of the home you wanted.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* completed the creation pre-eternally, so all things are created in respect to Him (as the mini model alluded to above). He *Glorified is He* then manifests them in accordance with what He has measured for them.

Consider well the saying of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: 'His command is only when He intends a thing that He says to it, "Be," and it is.' (*Ya Sin*: 82) It is as though the object is already in existence and Allah is merely exposing it. He is not creating it anew. By no means, rather, it is created and awaiting command in order to be made manifest in the world of events. This explains the saying of the people of direct knowledge of Allah: 'Affairs, He is only exposing them: He is no longer originating them.'

If the True Lord *Glorified is He* made overt mention of the Night Journey in this verse, indeed, by commitment, He also mentioned the Ascension in the chapter of *an-Najm*, in His saying: 'Near it is the Garden of Refuge. When there covered the Lote Tree that which covered [it]. The sight [of the Prophet] did not swerve, nor did it transgress [its limit]. He certainly saw of the greatest signs of his Lord.' (*an-Najm*: 15-18) In respect to the Night Journey, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'To show him of Our signs.' Then, in respect to the Ascension, He says: 'He certainly saw of the greatest signs of his Lord.' (*an-Najm*: 18) This is because the Night Journey is a terrestrial verse in respect to which the Messenger Muhammad—with the inspiration Allah granted him—was capable of demonstrating his truthfulness that he was carried by night from the Inviolable Mosque to the Most Remote Mosque for his people were well aware of his history; they knew he had never travelled to Jerusalem or seen it. Fittingly, they confronted him: 'Describe it,' they jeered. This contestation of theirs affirmed the fact that they knew he had never seen Jerusalem.

Consider for a moment, the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* after experiencing something of that nature, do you think that he emerged from it with a completely preserved picture of Jerusalem, given the fact that his visit took place during the night hours? So, as its picture was not entirely clear before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, Allah

with His immense power resolved to bring the picture (of Jerusalem) before him; and he (The Prophet) began to describe it to them as though it was placed before his eyes.

In identical fashion, he informed them of one of their caravans on the road. He described it in detail and told them it would arrive at sunrise on the specific day of its arrival. The road between the Inviolable Mosque and the Most Remote Mosque was travelled by and well known among the Arabs. It was one of their trade routes to the Levant.

In fact, they did gather in the early morning hours of that day, awaiting the caravan. So, at sunrise one of them said, 'Here is the sun rising.' At that moment, another responded, 'and there is the caravan, it has appeared.'⁽¹⁾

Thus, he was able to demonstrate the truthfulness of the Night Journey. As it was a terrestrial sign that made such a demonstration possible on account of what they knew about Jerusalem and what they knew about their travelling caravan.

As for what took place during the Ascension, those were magnificent and heavenly signs which the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would not —before his people—be able upon which to furnish evidence. The True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to make the verification of the terrestrial

(1) *Adduced by Ibn Hisham in (as-Sirat an-nabawiyya) [1/402] from the narration of Um Hani: The Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Indeed, as I was passing by the caravan of some clan in some part of the desert, they were put to flight by the sound of an animal and one of their camels got away, so I pointed it out to them. At that time, I was heading toward the Levant. I then shifted direction until I was in Dajnan. I then passed the caravan of another clan and found them asleep. They had a vessel filled with water with them which they had covered with something. So, I removed its cover, drank from it and recovered it, leaving it how I found it. The proof of this is that now their caravan is heading toward (Thanyat at-Tan'im). It is led by an excellent camel which is adorned with two bags: one black and the second as white as lightning.' She then continued, 'The people of Thanya set out early the next morning. At first, they did not encounter the camel he had described to them. Upon this they asked about the vessel, to which they were informed (by the members of the caravan) that they had left it filled with water and covered it, but later on when they awoke, they found it covered as before, only it was empty. While they (the members of the caravan) were in Mecca, they were questioned by others. "He has spoken the truth," they replied. We were put to flight in the valley that he mentioned and one of our camels got away; then we heard the voice of a man guiding us to it, in order that we might retrieve it.'*

signs that could be evidenced a means toward believing that which cannot be evidenced, such as the verses of ascending to the heavens. Is there anyone who has ascended to 'The Lote tree of the farthest limit' so that the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* could describe it for him?

The upshot of all this is that the terrestrial signs can be evidenced. So when it is proven and established that the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* engaged in an action securely outside the normal chain of events in terms of time and space, when he tells you of something else that supersedes natural law, you should believe him unhesitatingly. The sign of the Night Journey came to draw the verse of the Ascension closer to the minds of mankind.

Therefore, He who allowed him (The Prophet) to supersede the natural laws of the earth in pursuit of its verses could also enable him to supersede the laws that govern the sky in pursuit of its signs. So Allah *Glorified is He* draws the affairs of the unseen closer (to man's understanding); affairs which are imperceptible by logic and the unaided senses. Additionally, the similes He employed—which used a perceptible object—to express the manifold (up to 700 times) increase upon wealth expended in the way of Allah, falls under this category. The True Lord *Glorified is He* wished to make this clear and draw it closer to the human intellect, so He mentioned in that connection: 'The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like a seed [of grain] which grows seven spikes; in each spike is a hundred grains. And Allah multiplies [His reward] for whom He wills. And Allah is all-Encompassing and knowing.' (*al-Baqara*: 261)

It is then, from Allah's subtle kindness in dealing with the minds of His creatures, that He reinforced the signs of the Night Journey with clear and compelling scripture. The verses of the Ascension, on the other hand, while compelling, occur in the chapter of *an-Najm* (and are not entirely clear in meaning). This explains the judgment of the scholars: 'He who rejects the Night Journey is a disbeliever, while he who rejects the Ascension is simply guilty of deviance.'

Nevertheless, later authorities in their revisionary capacity have also concluded that one who rejects the Ascension becomes a disbeliever. For although it is undeniably true that the Ascension occurs in language that is not

entirely clear, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in his noble Prophetic Hadith clarified its meaning. And the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘...accept whatever the Messenger gives you, and refrain from anything he prohibits you.’ (*al-Hashr*: 7)

One who reflects deeply upon the Night Journey and the Ascension recognizes that in addition to consoling the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and alleviating his burden, they (the Night Journey and the Ascension) serve an objective of more lasting impact. They stand as proof that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was supported by Allah and was given miracles. Natural laws and normative codes were defied on his account in order that the sincerity of his prophethood be honoured and established. Miracle: an extraordinary affair that takes place in creation, manifested by Allah on the hand of His Messenger Muhammad in order to demonstrate his truthfulness. One such occurrence is that which happened in respect to Abraham *peace be upon him* ‘the dear friend of Allah’; in which his people flung him to the fire. The most obvious characteristic of fire is that it burns, so, was the purpose (of this miracle) rescuing Abraham from the fire? If the purpose had been his rescue, then surely Allah would not have allowed them to apprehend him in the first place. And even if they did apprehend him, Allah could have caused rain to descend from the sky and extinguish the fire.

Therefore, the point here is not Abraham’s rescue. The point is establishing the contravention of natural laws on Abraham’s account. As a result, Allah desired that the fire would remain ablaze and that they would seize him, and cast him to the flames. All of the necessary causes of his being incinerated were present.

It is at this point that Allah’s will to display the miraculous—something that defies natural laws—intervened. So, combustion is from the natural characteristics of fire, but fire is a created thing from among Allah’s creation. It, too, complies with its orders. Allah commanded the fire not to burn and divested it of this characteristic. As in His saying: ‘Allah said, "O fire, be coolness and safety upon Abraham."' (*al-Anbiya'*: 69)

Perhaps those sceptical of the validity of the Night Journey and the Ascension will find that that which draws these miraculous occurrences closer to their intellects is what we now witness in terms of advancement in transportation

technology. Remote distances have been made closer for us. Indeed, humans are able to traverse space and ascend to other planets in measured amounts of time. Consequently, if it is within the reach of humankind to descend on the moon, do you deem the Night Journey and the Ascension to be far-flung and they were acts of Allah?

Similar to this, among the things that stand affront of those who reject the Night Journey and the Ascension is the affair of the chest incision, which was related by the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. As for he who properly surveys it, he finds it a natural stage in the preparation for what he was about to encounter: entirely new horizons in a realm completely different from that of human beings.

How (is this disputable) when we prepare in like manner while travelling from one country to the other? The purpose is to help you get acclimated and accustomed to your new environment. Do you think any differently about Prophet Muhammad? He was about to meet the Angel Gabriel and others from the angels, all of whom possessing natures which are at complete variance with those of human beings. He was about to meet his brothers from among the Prophets during their posthumous existence. He was about to be separated from his Lord *Glorified is He* by merely two bows' lengths or perhaps less. Thus, it is not strange that a change would take place within His physical complexion in order to enable him to directly engage these events.

If we read the Quran inductively, we come upon something that establishes Prophet Muhammad's truthfulness in connection with what he related about meeting the Prophets during this journey. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Ask any of our messengers whom we sent forth before your time.' (*az-Zukhruf*: 45)

When the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was given a command from his Lord, he hastened its execution; so how would he execute this command in the above verse? There is no means of implementing this order except by way of direct contact—a vis-à-vis meeting—with the Prophets. Hence, when the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* proclaims this to us, in the form of the Night Journey and the Ascension, our response should be: You have spoken the truth. Doubt will only abound in weak hearts, those lacking faith and certainty.

The critical and underlying theme in this case—that of the Night Journey and the Ascension—is recognizing the believer's certainty in the sincerity of Allah's Messenger and that of the mind's dictates. Is your intellect able to grasp everything in creation?

Many indeed are the affairs which confound the intellect, making it incapable of understanding their essence. However, with the passage of time and the steady progress of knowledge, those things begin to unravel gradually. As a result, those affairs that Allah wills to uncover for us—from among creation's secrets—He enlightens us to their worldly causes by way of discovery, invention, or maybe even simply by chance.

Moreover, the intellect is nothing besides a means of grasping and perceiving phenomena, similar to the eye or the ear. It has its limitations which it is unable to exceed. By no means then, should you regard your mind as limitless in its ability to comprehend everything. Rather, it is also governed by limits.

In order to explicate this, take the eye for instance. It is the means of capturing sight and is controlled by the laws of vision. As such, when you see a person, for example, you are able to see all his facial features clearly. But as more and more distance separates you, he will gradually become smaller and smaller until he disappears from view. The sense of hearing is identical to this. With your ear, you are able to hear sounds, but as you move further away from the source of the sound, your ability to hear it steadily decreases until your ability to perceive the sound is cut-off and you hear nothing.

The intellect functions like other vehicles of sensory perception; it too has limitations. Its ability to grasp things is not unrestricted. Herein lies the point at which the scientists, when they desire to overcome the natural limitations of the eye or the ear—when these prove incapable of performing their functions—employ the use of spectacles or a microscope. These newly invented objects are means that enable the eye to see what it would not have been able to see. It is the same with respect to the ear; they employ the use of the hearing aid to help the ear if it is weak and unable to perform its function.

All vehicles of perception have limitations and the mind is no exception. By no means should you consider your mind capable of encompassing everything. However, if you are presented with something, you investigate it.

If you are assured that its source is truthful, the matter is concluded. Accept what you have been presented with on the basis that it is sound. This is what happened with Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* when they approached him, blabbering their mouths about his companion: He was taken by night from Mecca to Jerusalem! He was left with no response except, 'If he said it, then it's true.' The words of the Messenger Muhammad were the criteria he used to judge the truth. As long as it was said by the Messenger it was true; hence, the function of the intellect had no share in the matter. He then said, 'How could I fail to affirm his truthfulness in this affair when indeed, I believe him concerning a matter greater than this: I believe he receives revelation from the heavens'.⁽¹⁾

Fittingly, the verse of the Night Journey was a terrestrial verse that can be evidenced. It is possible for humankind to understand that within the Night Journey, the natural laws that govern creation were defied on account of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

One who carefully reflects upon this chapter recognizes that it is named the chapter of *al-Isra* and Bani Isra'il despite the fact that only the first verse treats the Night Journey while the majority of it treats the children of Israel. What then, is the wisdom behind mentioning the children of Israel after the Night Journey?

Previously, we mentioned: To be sure, the wisdom behind conversing about the Night Journey after the conclusion of the chapter of *an-Nahl* was that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* experienced consternation from the plots (of the idolaters). The True Lord *Glorified is He* desired to alleviate his burden and console him through the Night Journey.

The children of Israel were familiar with a particular understanding of prophethood; one in which a prophet is exclusively dispatched to his own people. This is how they viewed Moses. So when Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* steps forward and proclaims: I am a messenger to all of humanity, of

(1) Cited by Al-Bayhaqi in (*Dala'il An-Nubuwwa*) [2/360] from the narration of 'Aisha *may Allah be pleased with her*. It was also cited by Al-Hakim in his *Mustadrak* [3/62]. He said concerning it: 'Its chain of narrators is sound, but Al-Bukhari and Muslim did not narrate it.' Ad-Dhahabi agreed with him.

course, these people will oppose him and say, 'If you really were a prophet and we granted you that, you would only be a prophet for Arabs and none besides them. You have nothing to do with the children of Israel for we have our own message, and Jerusalem represents a standard for us.'

This explains why the True Lord *Glorified is He* willed to turn the attention of the children of Israel to the generality of Muhammad's Message. This was the underlying factor in the Muslim's early direction of prayer being made Jerusalem. This was followed by his being taken there during the night hours in order to show that Jerusalem had become one of Islam's holy sites and thus authentically claimed by Muslims.

Next, the address shifts to Moses and the children of Israel. Allah says:

وَأَتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ وَجَعَلْنَاهُ هُدًى لِّبَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ أَلَّا تَتَّخِذُوا مِن دُونِي وَكِيلًا ﴿٢﴾

**We also gave Moses the Scripture, and made it a guide for the children of Israel. Entrust yourselves to no one but Me[2]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 2)**

His saying '...we gave' means We revealed its meanings to him, like Allah's saying: 'And it is not for any human being that Allah should speak to him except by revelation or from behind a partition or that He sends a messenger to reveal, by His permission, what He wills.' (*ash-Shura*: 5) So there is not any direct contact in this matter. 'Scripture' referred to here is the Torah, if mentioned in connection with Jesus, the intended meaning becomes the Gospel, and if mentioned in isolation, without connection to anyone, the implicit meaning is the Noble Quran.

Divine inspiration (revelation) is given in the form of essential meanings. The Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then selects the utterances that correspond with these meanings, or that role is assumed by his disciples or followers. This is like the Prophetic Hadiths, the meanings of which are from the True Lord *Glorified is He*, but their mode of expression is from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This is how the Torah and Gospel were revealed.

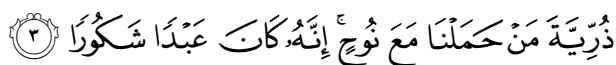
If someone were to inquire: Why was the Quran revealed in a divine mode of expression and source of meaning, whereas the Torah and the Gospel only have divine sources of meaning? We respond by stating that while the Quran was sent down as a book of instruction like the Torah and the Gospel, it was also sent down as a miracle that cannot be duplicated by anyone. No second party has any share in it. Accordingly, its mode of expression must remain as it was revealed by Allah *Glorified is He*.

The meanings and utterances of the Noble Quran were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and he was given only the meanings of the Prophetic Hadiths. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And made it guidance for the children of Israel.' This scripture did not descend for Moses *peace be upon him* exclusively; rather, it was delivered to the whole of the children of Israel in order to show the path of guidance to Allah. In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned: 'And We certainly gave Moses the Scripture, so do not be in doubt over his meeting. And we made the Torah guidance for the children of Israel.' (*as-Sajda: 23*)

Guidance: the path that leads to the destination in the shortest possible distance and with the least possible hardship. It is the Straight Path. Among engineers, it is well known that a straight line constitutes the shortest distance between two points. The True Lord *Glorified is He* then goes on to clarify the purity of this scripture and the purity of the guidance given to the children of Israel in His saying: '...that you not take other than Me as Disposer of affairs.' This is an expression of the incorruptible nature of the guidance and rootedness of its methodology.

'Disposer of affairs' is the one who acts on your behalf. You do not entrust your affair to someone else unless you are unable to discharge it yourself; hence, the one to whom your affair is entrusted is stronger and more capable than you. As you begin to observe those around you, you notice them being beset by calamities and sometimes even being overcome by them, for the rich do become poor, the strong become weak and those in good health deteriorate. In the same way, you observe death 'touching' humankind one after another. You conclude that none of these (persons) are suitable to dispose your affair or serve as your guarantor. Perhaps you would entrust your affair to one of them only to be taken by news of his death.

Therefore, if you are discerning, you will entrust your affair to one who is not liable to changes of neither fate nor death. For this reason, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* instructs us to be fully cognizant and aware of the essential reality of things, He says: 'Place your trust in The Living One who dies not.' (*al-Furqan*: 58) This is a constant, so in no way should you ever elect anyone besides Allah as a guarantor. This proviso holds even if that guarantor is a medium between you and your Lord, such as the Prophets. For they (the Prophets) never issued anything based on independent authority. They, on the contrary, conveyed what is sent from Allah *Glorified is He*. This explains the saying of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: 'And if we so willed, We could indeed take away whatever We have revealed unto you' (*al-Isra'*: 86). Or perhaps, if we had so desired, We would not have ever inspired you (with Our message). In such case, how would you gain instruction? The scholars have spoken at length concerning the verse: '...that you not take other than Me as Disposer of affairs.' Some of them have said this statement is proscriptive, while others have maintained that it is negative. The most likely correct opinion offers that it (the statement contained within the verse) should be interpreted in light of what precedes it: 'And We gave Moses the Scripture and made it a guidance.' The scripture and the guidance are explained and subsequently condensed (in a statement). Just as He *Glorified is He* says: 'But Satan whispered unto him, saying: "O Adam! Shall I lead you to the tree of life eternal, and [thus] to a kingdom that will never decay?"' (*Ta Ha*: 120) His saying (he whispered unto him saying, 'O Adam!') then, explains to us the content of Satan's insinuation. This is similar to His saying: 'And so, [when he was born,] We inspired the mother of Moses: Suckle him [for a time].'" (*al-Qasas*: 7) It is as though the meaning is: and We revealed to him: Do not take any as a guarantor besides Me. Or the meaning of the verse: We gave Moses the Scripture and made it a source of guidance for the children of Israel in order that you would take none besides Me as a guarantor. Continuing, the True Lord *Glorified is He* goes on to say:



You descendants of those We carried with Noah: he was truly a thankful servant [3] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 3)

The meaning becomes: You! O descendants of Noah! I have preferred you above others. However, why were the descendants of Noah singled out for mention? That is because Allah rescued the believers who were with him from flood and drowning and spared their lives. You—the descendants of those people—must call to mind this immense favour of Allah *Glorified is He* for your present existence is only an extension of your ancestors' (existence). It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* is reminding them of His favour upon them—in rescuing their forefathers who were with Noah. Accordingly, they should listen intently and adhere to the Way of Allah, which their forefathers knew experientially; they found that salvation and security from Allah's wrath are for those who believe in Him. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Indeed, he was a grateful servant.' Indeed, the True Lord *Glorified is He* conferred honour upon his descendants because he was a grateful servant. Righteous action benefits the descendants of one who works for it. Allah says what means, this is why We have afforded the descendants of Noah our special consideration. We shall never abandon them, allowing them to wonder blindly in the maze that is life. We will send unto them guidance which will illustrate the correct way and steer them clear of pitfalls and deviation.

Fathers always work for the well-being of their children. If he possesses abundant resources for the day, he strives to accumulate enough for the entire year. If he has in his possession abundant resources for the entire year, he says, 'I am working for my children.' Thus, he considers the welfare of his children more than he considers his own welfare. They always busy his thoughts; he chooses them over himself; he persistently sets about accumulating the good for them; and his ardent wish is to shoulder every burden and hardship they will encounter in life.

Even with this, the human being is subjected to changes of fate. And at last, the appointed time of his death overtakes him, leaving everything behind him. For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* directs us to the correct

course of action whereby which we are able to benefit our children: 'And let those [executors and guardians] fear [injustice] as if they [themselves] had left weak offspring behind and feared for them. So let them fear Allah and speak words of appropriate justice.' (*an-Nisa'*: 9)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* while teaching us that the blessing of fearing Allah is transferred to your children, gives us a practical example in the story of Moses and Khidr *peace be upon them* which the Noble Quran narrates in full. The intended moral of the story is that when they passed a township and solicited its citizens for food, the citizens of the township declined to host them. A request for food is a sign of the earnestness of the need. If someone, for instance, asks you for money, you might accuse him of hoarding it. On the other hand, if he asks you for a loaf of bread to eat, no doubt, he is a sincere solicitor. This proves that the township was ignoble and niggardly; they failed to accommodate (the stranger), and they did not appreciate the need of the one in straits. It was at this point that Moses was amazed when Khidr made his way to the dilapidated wall (without being asked) that was on the verge of collapse and mended it for these miserly people without requesting wages. 'So they set out, until when they came to the people of a town, they asked its people for food, but they refused to offer them hospitality. And they found therein a wall about to collapse, so Al-Khidr restored it. [Moses] said, "If you wished, you could have taken for it a payment."' (*al-Kahf*: 77) Upon which Al-Khidr revealed to Moses the reality of the affair; he displayed (for Moses) the hidden interpretations of events, that Allah *Glorified is He* had apprised him of the true nature of things Moses could not fathom.

'And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and there was beneath it a treasure for them, and their father had been righteous. So your Lord intended that they reach maturity and extract their treasure, as a mercy from your Lord. And I did it not of my own accord. That is the interpretation of that about which you could not have patience.' (*al-Kahf*: 82) The wall was the property of two adolescents that were (at the time) unable to protect their fortune from the avaricious populace. Due to their father being a righteous man (in his life), Allah appointed for their use someone who would help them preserve their fortune. The bottom line of this occasion is that their

father had been a righteous man, so Allah honoured them on his account and placed them in His care and under His supervision. This gives rise to the question: As these two youths reach puberty, how will they know about the hidden treasure?

Apparently, Al-Khidr, with the divine wisdom Allah imparted unto him, built the wall to remain standing only temporarily. After they reached puberty, it would begin to give, at which time they would be capable of protecting and defending the treasure.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* spells this case out for us once more in an alternate verse: 'And those who believed and whose descendants followed them in faith - We will join with them their descendants, and We will not deprive them of anything of their deeds. Every person, for what he earned, is retained.' (*at-Tur*: 21)

In order to honour fathers, We (Allah speaking) join them with their children. Even in the event of those children having scant good deeds when compared with their fathers—We increase the good deeds of the children without diminishing the reward of the fathers. His saying: 'Indeed, he was a grateful servant.' He is unfailingly and habitually thankful. They said concerning Noah 'that he would not acquire anything which enhanced his living condition except that he would thank Allah, nor would he experience any of Allah's blessings, which make life enjoyable, except that he would praise Allah.' They also said, 'when he ate, he would say: Praise be unto Allah who has fed me without the slightest bit of exertion or tiredness from me.' And when he drank: 'Praise be unto Allah who has quenched my thirst without the slightest bit of exertion or tiredness from me.' This was his state in all of his affairs.⁽¹⁾

(1) *Al-Qurtubi mentioned it in his exegetical work [5/3941] in the words of 'Amran ibn Salim: Noah was only called a grateful servant because when he ate he would say, 'Praise be unto Allah who has fed me, and if He so chose, could have allowed me to go hungry.' And when he drank, he would say, 'Praise be unto Allah who has given me drink, and if He so chose, could have allowed me to go thirsty.' And when he dressed he would say, 'Praise be unto Allah who has clothed me, and if He so chose, could have allowed to make me go naked.' And when he placed his shoes on, he would say, 'Praise be unto Allah who has given me shoes, and if He so chose, could have allowed me to go about unshod.' And when he relieved himself, he would say, 'Praise be unto Allah who has relieved me of that which harms me, and if He so chose, could have forced me to bear it.'*

Some of those given knowledge say, 'How many are the blessings the human being is heedless of!' Some people, we observe, exerting the utmost effort to invoke Allah's name at the onset of a meal and offer Him praise at its conclusion. However, despite this they are heedless of innumerable blessings which deserve gratitude and praise. As such, when a person discerns, he comprehends the favours of Allah and knows that divine favour necessitates praise. You will observe him performing what we call 'substitute praise'—which is similar to substitute prayer—namely: Praising Allah for those blessings he enjoyed without remembering Allah. So he says: 'Praise be unto Allah for every favour You have afforded me 'O' Lord, and those which I neglected to praise You for at the time of their occurrence.' He is persistent in this supplication, making it a practice.

He might even transcend praising Allah due to personal gratitude and praises Him on behalf of others who were blessed by Allah but neglected praising Him. He says, 'Praise be to Allah on behalf of everyone blessed with favours but has failed to praise You concerning them.' Thus, it is said that a person will not be asked on the Day of Judgment about the blessing that he praised Allah for because he has fulfilled its due praise and veneration.

However, praise and gratitude that go to the Divine Benefactor *Glorified is He* are profitable trade for the person who praises and shows gratitude, for Allah has said: 'If you are grateful, I would certainly give to you more.' (*Ibrahim*: 7) This means that whoever desires good for himself and would like the blessings to continue flowing should persist in praising and thanking Us.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَضَيْنَا إِلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ فِي الْكِتَابِ لُتُفْسِدُوا
فِي الْأَرْضِ مَرَّتَيْنِ وَلِتَعْلَنَ عُلوًّا كَبِيرًا

**We declared to the children of Israel in the Scripture,
'Twice you will spread corruption in the land and become
highly arrogant'[4] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 4)**

Allah *Glorified is He* says that He declared, which means that He enacted an irrevocable judgment and declared it to those subjects. The judge here is

Allah. The Arabic word *Qadaa'* (adjudication) means to settle disputing parties. This decisive settlement requires a duly qualified judge who has intimate knowledge of the system of law upon which his judgments are based. He must be able to properly weigh different types of evidence. Thus, the judge must be qualified, according to the standards of the disputants at least. All of them might be illiterate and know absolutely nothing about the law. Nonetheless, they have confidence in someone because they know he tells the truth and judges with justice among them. As a result, they raise their cases before him, seeking adjudication, content with him as their judge.

In addition, a judge does not rule exclusively according to his knowledge. A testimony must be provided by the claimant or else the defendant takes an oath. The testimony must be attended by attentive witnesses and the execution of the judgment is not carried out by the judge himself, rather, it falls to the responsibility of another entity. Moreover, the judge is subject to deception, fraud, perjury, or underhanded evidential posturing on behalf of a disputant.

Some perpetrator of injustice might be able to pull the wool over his eyes. He might be a clever speaker and ingratiate himself with the judge, and wins him over. All of these things happen within the world's legal systems. What do you think if the judge in question is Allah? He is a just Judge who does not need a testimony or witnesses. No one is able to deceive or mislead Him. He possesses total authority and thereby is not in need of anyone else to enforce His judgments. In summary, every aspect of the process is entrusted to Him.

This actually took place in a case of judgement administered by the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Are there any judges superior to the Messenger of Allah? Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I am only a human being, and you people have disputes. Maybe someone amongst you can present his case in a more eloquent and convincing manner than the other, and I give my judgment in his favour according to what I hear. Beware! If ever I give (by error) somebody something of his brother's right, then he should not take it as I have only given him a piece of Fire.'⁽¹⁾

Therefore, Prophet Muhammad assigned the ruling to the conscience of the claimants and advised the one seeking judgment to take account of himself

(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

and see what he deserves. Messenger Muhammad is a human and decides matters like them. Nonetheless, if you are able to make things vague to the judges of the earth, that trickery will not serve you at heaven's tribunal. This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, in reference to a person who seeks a judgment of others and is subsequently awarded a ruling that contravenes the truth and misses the right, 'ask your heart, even if they give you verdicts (and he repeated it three times)'.⁽¹⁾ He repeated it three times in order to draw our attention to the importance of being alerted and having a discerning mind in determining the lawful and the illicit. He must take account of himself and contemplate his affairs.

Allah says that He declared a decree to the children of Israel in the Scripture, i.e. the Torah. It is their book which was revealed to their prophet, and they are its custodians. So, Allah ruled concerning them: He handed down His Judgment and informed them of its content by revealing it to Moses and delivering it in the Torah. Further, He informed them, on the tongues of the Messengers, of the conditions attendant to their countenancing the Way of Allah. Would they acknowledge it and exercise its prescriptions or would they desert it and sow corruption in the land?

If their Messenger had informed them of their future activities that they come to commission of their own free wills, they should have felt reserved before their Lord and desisted from contravening the Way of Allah and transgressing His Instructions. They had to believe their Messenger in what he had conveyed to them; they should have obeyed him.

Allah says: 'Twice you will spread corruption in the land.' The Arabic particle *lam* is used here for emphasis. This implies that the verse includes a concealed oath whose presence is proven by the presence of this declaration. It is as though Allah is saying, 'By My very Existence, you will spread corruption in the land.' The oath must only be sworn by Allah. An alternative meaning could be that Allah is saying: 'Since we have decreed a decisive

(1) *Wabisa ibn M'abad Narrated that the Messenger Muhammad said to him, 'Ask your heart regarding it. Piety is that which contents the soul and comforts the heart, and sin is that which causes doubts and perturbs the heart, even if people pronounce it lawful and give you verdicts on such matters again and again.'* Narrated by Ahmad and Ad-Darimi

emphatic judgment whose dictates are inescapable, then you will surely cause corruption on the earth twice'. This hidden declaration has the meaning of the oath. An oath is only issued for emphasis that is embodied in His saying: 'We declared.' (*al-Isra'*: 4)

Corruption (*Al-Ifsad*) is to intend to remove something from its specific good that it is suited for it. Allah has created everything in the universe for specific purposes. If you leave them undisturbed, they will fulfil those specific purposes, but if you remove them from those specific purposes, they will lose their suitability, purposes, and objectives for which they were created by Allah.

Allah *Glorified is He* before creating and placing us on this planet, has created for us things that make our lives valuable, such as the earth, atmosphere, sun and sky, etc. However, He did not stop at that. He also placed within His creation objects, which human beings are capable of enhancing their Allah-given virtue through using their intellect. Thus, at least, if you are not capable of enhancing the virtuous in virtue, allow them to retain their Allah-given virtue.

For instance, if you own a well from which you derive water, you can preserve its natural state by leaving it undisturbed or you can enhance its benefit by hedging it in to protect it from the sand around it. You could also make deriving its benefit easier for people by adding a pump in order to extract water hidden deep in its base. These are but some of the many ways in which the good of the well can be enhanced. This is why Allah says: 'He brought you into being from the earth and made you dwell in it.' (*Hud*: 61) This means, He *Glorified is He* brought you into being out of the earth and made for you the things that are necessary for your life. Fittingly, if you would like to enrich your life, the only thing required of you is to use your created mind to contemplate and to let the created power that exists in your organs work within the material world that He created. You are not the natural source of anything you bring forward; rather, you employ the use of your intellect and utilise the power that exists in creation for the sake of Allah. You interact with the created planet of earth and it grants you accesses to all that you are looking for and the things that enrich your life and increase it in opulence and splendour, as a result.

Those who invented the water cistern employed the use of their minds and increased the innately good in goodness. Its benefits are innumerable as it enables us to lift large amounts of water to high heights. The inspiration for the invention of the water cistern was drawn from the phenomena of the universe. Its inventors recognised the down flow of water from mountain peaks to the depths of valleys. They derived the initial thought from this source and were successful in serving humanity.

Just as corruption occurs in the material realm, such as those who pollute the water or the air, it also occurs in the non-material realm. For example, your failure to implement the Divine Way, which was revealed by Allah for the guidance of creation and was ordered to be implemented, the act of concealing it or perverting it all constitute corruption within the Way of Allah.

Allah *Glorified is He* says to the children of Israel, 'Twice you will spread corruption in the land.' (*al-Isra'*: 4) Was the corruption of the children of Israel limited to just two occasions? By Allah, if this were so, they would have been freed of blame and this then is a charitable mention. However, they repeatedly spread great corruption in the land. Why did Allah say 'twice', then? Scholars have dedicated a great deal of attention toward these two times when they took place. They have concluded that they were in the pre-Islamic period, however, the one who reads the chapter of *al-Isra'* recognises steadfastly that it binds relating them to the time of Islam. It would appear that these are two recent events that took place in the bosom of Islam.

Allah mentioned the story of the children of Israel after mentioning the miraculous Night Journey. This establishes that Islam had extended to their holy lands as Jerusalem became the direction of prayer for Muslims, and the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was carried there by night afterwards. This implies that Jerusalem was authentically claimed by Islam. This is because Islam came for all people, as a protector of past religious traditions.

Therefore, it is more suitable that they say that these two times were in the bosom of Islam. This is because they were responsible for much corruption before Islam and Islam had nothing to do with their past corruption. Allah says, 'We declared to the children of Israel in the Scripture, "Twice you will

spread corruption in the land and become highly arrogant.”” (*al-Isra'*: 4) If this refers to their corruption generally, i.e. before the dawn of Islam, then their corruption is compounded. Is there any enormity grosser than what they said after traversing the sea when they came upon a people devoted to worshipping a calf? They said to Moses, 'O Musa! Make for us a god as they have [their] gods.' (*al-A'raf*: 138)

Is there any corruption more nefarious than murdering the Prophets, who Allah made the living embodiment of the Divine Message and a moral example? Not to mention distorting Scriptures. The one who observes the scriptural distortion of the children of Israel within the Torah finds that they distorted many aspects of the scripture and in myriad ways. So, there were elements of the Torah that they forgot, as Allah says: 'They neglected a portion of what they were reminded of.' (*al-Ma'ida*: 13) As for what they remembered, they did not leave it as it was revealed. Rather, they concealed some portions. Concerning what they did not conceal, they failed to leave as it had been revealed and distorted it, as Allah says: 'They altered the words from their places.' (*al-Ma'ida*: 13)

Nonetheless, they did not stop at forgetting, distorting, and concealing the scripture. They transgressed to the point of contriving their own messages and claiming that they emanated from Allah. Allah says: 'Woe, then, to those who write the book with their hands and then say: This is from Allah, so that they may take for it a small price.' (*al-Baqara*: 79) Is there any greater corruption in the Way of Allah than this?

Some authorities understand what occurred in the story of Goliath and Saul to constitute the first act of corruption, as Allah says: 'Have you not considered the chiefs of the children of Israel after Musa, when they said to a prophet of theirs: Raise up for us a king [that] we may fight in the way of Allah. He said: May it not be that you would not fight if fighting is ordained for you?' (*al-Baqara*: 246) Therefore, they requested, courted, and accepted fighting. However, when fighting was mandated for them, they disavowed it and refused to take up arms.

As for the second act of corruption, in the view of the previously mentioned authorities, it occurred after they gained their political power and

their territorial expansion controlling large swaths of land from north to south. This time they were raided by *Bakhtunassar*, who defeated them and committed many atrocities among them.

These interpretations adopt the view that the two acts of corruption were committed before Islam. However, it is more fitting to consider them to have occurred after the emergence of Islam. Thus, we would find a link between the story of the children of Israel and the chapter of *al-Isra'*. One might ask, 'how is that?'

Scholars said, when Islam emerged onto the scene, it called upon the people of the Book to attest to the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad. These were the same people of the Book who had erstwhile been seeking victory over the disbelievers by his arrival. 'Verily the shadow of a new prophet's day has risen and when he arrives, we will follow him and subsequently kill you as 'Ad and Iram were killed,' they would say when arguing with the idolaters of Medina.

This explains why Allah said to His Messenger Muhammad that indeed, they rejected him that Allah and those given knowledge of the Book are witnesses for him. Whoever possesses knowledge of the Book, from among them, knows of his coming, truthfulness as well as distinguishing marks. That the truthful among them believed in him *peace and blessings be upon him* is evident in their foreknowledge of Prophet Muhammad.

One of them said, 'When I first laid eyes on him, I recognised him as I recognise my very own son. In fact, my knowledge of (Prophet) Muhammad is more certain.' For indeed, there could be some doubt about the paternity of his son. However, he has no doubt at all as for the person of the Messenger Muhammad due to what he had read in their scriptures and had known of his defining characteristics. Prophet Muhammad is described in their Scriptures and they fully knew him as they knew their own children. Therefore, they had been seeking victory over the disbelievers through the arrival of the Messenger of Allah. They were to be honoured by his coming and they arranged for his dispatch. In spite of that, 'when there came to them [Prophet] that which they did not recognise, they disbelieved in him.' (*al-Baqara*: 89) What was the stance of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when they disbelieved in him after his migration to Medina? Once in Medina, he enacted

a treaty with them to live thereby. He *peace and blessings be upon him* faithfully upheld the terms of the treaty. On the other hand, when they acted treacherously and transgressed the inviolable rights of the Muslims and defamed them by way of calumny, Messenger Muhammad probed into their homes, killed, and banished them from Medina to the Levant and *Kahyber*. This was the commandment of Allah to his Messenger Muhammad as expressed in the verse: 'He it is Who caused those who disbelieved of the followers of the Book to go forth from their homes at the first banishment you did not think that they would go forth, while they were certain that their fortresses would defend them against Allah; but Allah came to them whence they did not expect, and cast terror into their hearts; they demolished their houses with their own hands and the hands of the believers; therefore take a lesson, O you who have eyes.' (*al-Hashr*: 2)

This act, which was performed by the Jewish tribes of Banu Nadir, Banu Qaynuqa' and Banu Quraydha constitutes the first act of corruption. These tribes were responsible for treacherously betraying the treaty with Messenger Muhammad after they sought victory over the disbelievers through his advent. The text of the following verse corroborates what we have arrived at about the two acts of corruption: they occurred after the emergence of Islam.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

فَإِذَا جَاءَ وَعْدُ أُولَئِهِمَا بَعَثْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ عِبَادًا لَنَا أُولَىٰ بَأْسٍ
شَدِيدٍ فَجَاسُوا خِلَالَ الدِّيَارِ وَكَانَ وَعْدًا مَّفْعُولًا ﴿٥﴾

**When the first of these warnings was fulfilled, We sent
against you servants of Ours with great force, and they
ravaged your homes. That warning was fulfilled [5]
(The Quran, *al-Isra*: 5)**

It is well known that the word *idha* is an adverb denoting a future time. Just as you could say: If (*idha*) so and so comes I will honour him. This stands as proof that the first of the corrupt actions had yet to occur. As such, the assertion that the first act of corruption took place within the story of Talut (Saul) and Jalut (Goliath) while the second occurred in the story of *Bukhtanassar* is fraught with difficulty.

As for His saying 'prediction', a prediction is not granted for things that happened in the past. Rather, a prediction specifically involves the future. His saying 'the first of two' is understood to imply the first act of corruption. His saying: '...We sent against you some of Our slaves...' (*al-Isra'*: 5). This expression contains yet further evidence that indicates that the two acts of corruption occurred in the lap of Islam (its emergence and spread). For indeed, the word '*ibad*' is only applied to believers, while Jalut—who was killed by Talut—and Bakhtanassar were both disbelievers.

Concerning His statement '*ibadan lana*', the scholars have addressed it; some have averred that the terms '*ibad*' and '*abid*' are synonyms. They add that His saying '*ibad*' encompasses believers and disbelievers alike. They then offer evidence to support their claim. Among the proofs they offer is the True Lord's saying (within the story of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*') 'And lo! Allah said: "O 'Isa, son of Maryam! Did you say unto men, 'Worship me and my mother as deities beside Allah'?"' ['Isa] answered: "Limitless are You in Your glory! It would not have been possible for me to say what I had no right to [say]! Had I said this, You would indeed have known it! You know all that is within myself, whereas I know not what is within Your Self. Verily, it is You alone who fully knows all the things that are beyond the reach of a created being's perception. Nothing did I tell them beyond what You did bid me [to say]: 'Worship, [who is] my Lord as well as your Lord.' And I bore witness to what they did as long as I dwelt in their midst; but since you caused me to die, You alone have been their keeper: for You are witness unto everything. 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*: 116-118) The specific point of reference here is His saying '...If you cause them to suffer—verily, they are Your servants...' (*al-Ma'ida*: 118). The word '*ibad*' means disbelievers here. Upon the basis of this address it would not be implausible for Jalut and Bukhtanassar, (to be referred to with the same appellation) for they were two disbelievers given authority over the children of Israel. Furthermore, they deduce (the same conclusion) from a separate verse which narrates some of the Day of Judgment's happenings. Addressing the idols—who were taken as partners besides Allah—Allah *the Exalted* says: '...Was it you who led these

slaves of Mine (*'ibad*) astray, or did they by themselves stray from the right path...' (*al-Furqan*: 17).

Again, the term 'slaves' (*'ibad*) is applied to disbelievers.

So as for His saying '... We sent against you some of Our slaves...' (*al-Isra'*: 5).

It is not absolutely necessary that they (those being referred to) be believers. They could just as well be disbelievers. Here, we would like to offer: Indeed, the True Lord *the Exalted* when He desires to requite them, He empowers and installs someone like them—disbelievers and oppressive tyrants—over them. When He *Glorified is He* desires to requite the actions of an unjust oppressor, He places over that oppressor, one more harsh and oppressive than himself. As indicated by His saying: 'And in this manner do We cause evildoers to seduce one another by means of their [evil] doings.' (*al-An'am*: 129)

While the proponents of this position have evidences which bolster their claims—that the word (*'ibad*) is applied to believers and disbelievers alike—we will now begin surveying the evidence that suggests that its application is strictly reserved for believers.⁽¹⁾

To begin with, His saying: 'For, [true] servants of the Most Gracious are [only] they who walk gently on earth, and who, whenever the foolish address them, reply with [words of] peace; and who remember their Lord far into the night, prostrating themselves and standing; and who pray: "O our Lord, avert from us the suffering of hell – for, verily, the suffering caused by it is bound to be a torment dire: verily, how evil an abode and a station!" And who, whenever they spend on others, are neither wasteful nor niggardly but [remember that] there is always a just mean between those [two extremes]' (*al-Furqan*: 63-67).

(1) al-Azhari said: People have generally settled upon maintaining some difference between the slaves of Allah (*'ibad*) and bondsmen. So they say, 'this is a slave from among the slaves of Allah (*'ibad*).' While they say, 'these are slaves, (*'abid*) owned by people. Al-layth has mentioned: the polytheists are referred to as (*abadat at-taghut*) slaves of idols, while the believers are referred to as (*'ibad ar-Rahman*) slaves of the Merciful. [*Lissan al-'arab*] under the entry ع ب د

Described within these verses—from their beginning until their conclusion—we find the characteristics of sincere believers. The term applied to them is *'ibad ar-Rahman* (slaves of the Most Merciful). The saying of the True Lord *Glorified is He* as He rebuked Iblis, provides additional support: 'verily, you shall have no power over my servants...' (*al-Hijr*: 42).

The believers are being specifically mentioned here: '[Whereupon Iblis] said: "Then [I swear] by Your very might: I shall most certainly beguile them all into grievous error, [all] save such of them as are truly Your servants!"' (*Sad*: 82-83)

Everyone has advanced their proofs and corroborating evidence; yet, the conundrum doggedly persists. In order to escape this conundrum, we must analyze the following: Both the words *'ibad* and *'abid* are pluralized forms of the word *'abd*, what then is their difference? If you surveyed all creatures—the believers among them as well as the disbelievers—you would find that all of them exercise choice in some matters and are compelled in others. The term *'abid* is understood by everyone, in this manner, the believer and the disbeliever are the same in relation to the things in which they are compelled, To that effect, all creatures are slaves *'abid* in relation to that which leaves them no room to exercise their wills.

After this, we are capable of separating them in two categories: slaves *'abid* that remain slaves and do not gain inclusion under the umbrella of *'ibad*, and slaves *'abid* whose righteous actions and willing surrender to Allah's Commandments elevate them until they come under the umbrella of *'ibad* Allah's servants.

How is that (one might be prompted to ask)? To be sure, Allah has made a realm of free-will within your actions. He has made you capable of acting and reacting. Although He has made you fit for belief and fit for disbelief, He *the Exalted* has ordered you to be faithful as your responsibility.

It is within this realm of free will, that the slaves (*'abid*) and the servants (*'ibad*) become distinct personalities. Those who believe in Allah consign their free will to the will of their Lord, and forfeit what they desire in exchange for what their Lord desires from them within their discretionary actions. You will observe them faithfully implementing all that Allah has

commanded. They make those things in which they have been allowed to exercise free will as though they are being compelled. (If one could personify their actions) Their actions are a clearly pronounced declaration of 'We hear and we obey'. These are the slaves (*'ibad*) who have entirely consigned their affair to Allah within the realm of free will. There is no will for them besides the will of Allah *the Exalted*.

The word *'ibad* then, is applied to one who forgoes the realm of free-will, and makes himself subjugated before Allah even in matters in which he has been allowed to exercise choice. As for those who disbelieve, they give preference to what they want and abandon what Allah wants. They engage in the exercise of free will and are unmindful of the will of Allah. When He allows them to use their free wills: 'Do you believe or disbelieve (Allah says to the servant)?', 'I disbelieve,' he responds. 'Will you consume liquor or will you abstain?', 'I will consume it,' he answers. 'Will you steal or will you refrain?', 'I will steal,' he replies. These are the slaves (*'abid*). They are never to be referred as *'ibad* (servants), for they are unfit for such a noble designation.

To complete our treatment of that which makes this issue problematic we must be aware that the range of free will is limited to the life of this world and the realm of obligation and responsibility. These are the places of free-will, so accordingly, within their parameters we are able to distinguish among the servants (*'ibad*), who humbly surrender to their Lord and relinquish what they desire in exchange for what He *Glorified is He* desires, and the slaves (*'abid*) who rebel and choose other than the will of Allah *the Exalted*. In terms of the things in which they are compelled, there is no way to escape this ambiguous issue.

When the Hereafter arrives, there will be no room for free will or responsibility. All will be subjugated before Allah *the Exalted*. The demarcation between slaves and servants will have no relevance. Hence, all will essentially be slaves (*'abid*) and servants (*'ibad*) at once. Summarily, we can say: indeed, all will become servants (*'ibad*) in the Hereafter, whereas in the life of this world not all people fit that designation. With this as our foundation we can understand the meaning of (*'ibad*) in the following verses: 'If you cause them to suffer—verily, they are Your servants...' (*al-Ma'ida*: 118) '...Was it you that led my servants astray...' (*al-Furqan*: 17).

The True Lord *Glorified is He* is referring to them as servants (*'ibad*) because the ability to act and subsequently rebel was not returned to them. In that case, they are equivalent to the believers in their lack of choice in what Allah *the Exalted* wants.

As such, the True Lord's saying: 'Hence, when the prediction of the first of those who [periods of iniquity] came true, We sent against you some of Our servants...' (*al-Isra'*: 5). What is intended here is the first act of corruption committed by the Jewish tribes in the shade of Islam; when they broke their covenant with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. The servants (*'ibad*) referred to here are the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and those who investigated their (the Jewish tribes) homestead with them. They banished some of them from Medina, executed (for treason) some of them, and took others captive.

His saying: '...of terrible prowess in war...' (*al-Isra'*: 5) is might and vigour. This was the state of the Muslims in Medina. After they had established their own community and were imbued with bravery, they used that to confront the people of falsehood. This was not the weakness they had known in Mecca.

His saying, '...and they wrought havoc throughout the land...' (*al-Isra'*: 5) (*Jasa*) means to investigate, to survey an area, to pursue those dwelling in it. This is what is referred to in police jargon as combing an area.

It is a technical term that implies a detailed and deliberate search for criminals in an area. It is likened to combing the hair because the comb separates the individual hairs. Once more, this is indicative of a highly detailed search. For, sometimes the comb merely separates the hairs at the surface, whereas at other times it is used to part with a depth that reaches the scalp and removes anything lodged at the roots of the hair.

So, *jasa* implies that they pursued them vigorously until none from among them were able to hide. This is what occurred with the Jewish tribes in Medina: Banu Qaynuqa, Banu Qurayzha, Banu Nadir and the Jewish tribes of Khaybar. We observe that the Quran chooses the expression '...We sent...' (*al-Isra'*: 5). This 'sending forth' is an indication of magnanimity and mercy. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was not acting aggressively. On

the contrary, he was acting in defence of Islam in front of those who betrayed the treaty and broke the covenant.

The word '...against you...' (*al-Isra'*: 5) connotes supremacy and dominance.

Allah's saying '...and so the prediction was fulfilled.' (*al-Isra'*: 5) That is to say: A promise that must be realized, because it is a promise from One who is capable of its fulfilment. There is no might capable of interfering with the fulfilment of what He has promised. By no means should it (His promise) be considered like the promise which may or may not be fulfilled, such as the promise made by a person that they will be able to meet you tomorrow.

In order for a promise to find fulfilment you must possess the lasting capacity to follow through and make good on your promise. However, some unexpected occurrence could take place and come between your ability to follow through. A true promise then can only be issued by one unaffected by unplanned happenings, one who possesses the enduring ability to make good on his promise. His promise is the unfailingly realized promise.

Perhaps one might question: A promise is only offered for future events which contain good; how can the Quran term these events in such a way? As in His saying: '...We sent against you some of Our slaves of terrible prowess in war...' (*al-Isra'*: 5).

They say that the notification of impending evil is expressed as a *Wa'id* (threat), while the term promise (*w'ad*) can encompass both the fortuitous and the ominous. This is because something could appear outwardly bad and be good inwardly. Also germane to our discussion is that when the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to chastise those who deviated from His way (He punished them in this manner). Although we might see that as being outwardly negative, it is in actuality positive for them, if they attempt to benefit from it.

We offer as an example of this: One who is chastised by his father as the result of his (the child's) negligence or lack of effort. His father punishes him severely because he longs to see his improvement. The poet spoke truthfully when he said:

He was harsh, so they were restrained. And so he who acts judiciously

Must at times be harsh with the one who often shows clemency

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then goes on to say:

ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَا لَكُمُ الْكَرَّةَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَأَمْدَدْنَاكُمْ بِأَمْوَالٍ
وَبَنِينَ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ أَكْثَرَ نَفِيرًا ﴿٦﴾

**But then We allowed you to prevail against your enemy.
We increased your wealth and offspring and made
you more numerous [6] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 6)**

The address in this verse is directed toward the children of Israel. Additionally, the verse represents a (chronological) point of transformation and change of fate. After what we discussed about the triumph of the Muslims and Allah granting them authority (over the children of Israel) in order to chastise the children of Israel, we recognize here that this was not a continuous state of affairs. This is due to the fact that the Muslims subsequently relinquished the Way of Allah that had been the source of their elevation. They now renounced their earlier status as the servants (*'ibad*) of Allah and were beset with tribulation. In a reverse of fate, the Jews were now granted authority over them. The awakening of the Jews, an emerging group-awareness, after they were chastised by the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Muslims in Medina, is to be accounted for this phenomenon. They began to analyze their condition and the breaches of faith and conduct that had contributed to it.

To be sure, during this time they acquired a modicum of steadfastness upon the Way of Allah. Or perhaps, at the very least, the Muslims deviated from the Way of Allah and veered from the straight path. The matters of faith had unravelled within the souls of the Muslims, they splintered into various nations, each nation possessing its own geographical borders and political system — related in some way to Islam—in short, their characterization as Allah's servants became unwound.

So after their might and probity upon the Way of Allah, after they deserved to be servants (*'ibad*) of Allah in the truest sense, they regressed and repudiated the Way of their Lord. They began to consult codes of positive law within their litigation and (unsurprisingly) their enemies were given power over them in order to chastise them. The Jews were granted triumph, which

explains Allah's saying: 'And after a time We allowed you to prevail against them once again...' (*al-Isra'*: 6).

Thumma is a subjoined particle within the Arabic language. It serves as an indication of succession which is separated by intervals of time, whereas the particle (*fa'*) indicates immediate succession. As expressed in the saying of Allah *the Exalted*: 'And in the end, He causes him to die and brings him to the grave; and then, if it be His will, He shall raise him again to life.' (*Abasa*: 21-22)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* did not say 'We allowed you to prevail against them once again.' Rather, He said, 'And after a time We allowed you to prevail against them once again...' This is because between the first times—which involved the Muslims during the era of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*—and the time in which the Jews were triumphant there was a long interval of time.

No wars raged between us and them for many centuries; since the age of the Messenger until the Declaration of Balfour [He is the political figure that granted them the right to establish a national sovereign state in Palestine]. The time of their victory over us occurred in 1967, hence the appropriate use of the subjoining particle *thumma*, which expresses that elapsed time.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And after a time We allowed you to prevail against them once again...' (*al-Isra'*: 6). That is to say: We granted the children of Israel victory, might, prominence, and authority over the Muslims. This is due to the Muslims abandonment of the Way of their Lord and their disregard for the conditions that made them the servants of Allah.

The word *Karra* connotes the attack and retreat formations used by soldiers during the course of fighting. Advancing to engage at times and deescalating the attack at others. Allah's saying: '...and aided you with wealth and offspring, and made you more numerous [than ever].' (*al-Isra'*: 6) Allah empowered them economically until eventually they became major shareholders in capital markets all over the world. He also empowered them by way of their children, who would come to teach them and refine them in all fields at considerably high levels of erudition.

Nevertheless, this is not what gives them the ability to attack Muslims. In spite of the immense amounts of wealth and children they possess they are essentially weaklings. In their quest for establishment, they have no

alternative besides dependence on foreign allies and supporters. This is sufficiently clear, and has not needed additional explanation since the preliminary steps were taken to establish their nation state or so called 'national homeland' in Palestine.

This is what is understood by Allah's statement: '...and made you more numerous'. 'And after a time We allowed you to prevail against them once again, and aided you with wealth and offspring, and made you more numerous [than ever].' (*al-Isra'*: 6)

The term *Nafir* means the one who is called upon to aid someone. Here, in the scope of our discussion it would apply to the superpowers that support the Jews and fight the Muslims.

And they are still attacking us, and will remain so until we return to being as we were: servants to Allah, steadfast upon His Way, governing according to His book. This promise will be fulfilled if Allah so wills, as the following verse mentions:

إِنْ أَحْسَنْتُمْ أَحْسَنْتُمْ لِأَنْفُسِكُمْ وَإِنْ أَسَأْتُمْ فَلَهَا فَإِذَا جَاءَ وَعْدُ
الْآخِرَةِ لِيَسْئَلُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ وَلِيَدْخُلُوا الْمَسْجِدَ كَمَا
دَخَلُوهُ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ وَلِيُتَبَرُوا مَا عَلَوْا تَتْبِيرًا ﴿٧﴾

**Whether you do good or evil it is to your own souls — and
when the second warning was fulfilled [We sent them] to
shame your faces and enter the place of worship as they did
the first time, and utterly destroy whatever fell into their
power [7] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 7)**

The address is still being directed toward the children of Israel. Great indeed, are the many principles which Allah enacts in creation, principles that in their effect equalize the believer and disbeliever: Whoever acts with good shall have good and whoever acts with iniquity shall be burdened with his iniquity, is one such principle. So before us are the Jews, who gained triumph on the basis of a simple modicum of steadfastness upon the Way of Allah or at least an amount of steadfastness commensurate with the regression of the Muslims from the Way. This is an established norm in creation: Whoever

desires triumph will be given triumph. This stands because the True Lord *Glorified is He* is far-removed from ever being an oppressor, even in dealing with those who oppose His religion and His Way.

Evidence of this can be found by observing what became of the Muslims after their shrinking from the Way of Allah.

His saying: '[And We said:] If you preserve in doing good...' (*al-Isra': 7*). This contains an indication that they were experiencing doubt, whether or not to do right. It is as if one of them was saying to the other: Can we not just forget about this issue of doing right?

If, at the moment, the Jews are ruling the day, will it remain theirs down the long road? No, their predominance will not last and their aggression against Muslims is not permanent. This is proven by the True Lord's saying: 'And so, when the prediction of the second [period of your iniquity] came true...' (*al-Isra': 7*).

That is to say: When the time of their second act of corruption arrives. For it has already been stated that the True Lord *Glorified is He* says '...Twice indeed, you will spread corruption in the earth...' (*al-Isra': 4*).

We have already clarified the first act of corruption, in which they broke their agreement with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* in Medina.

This verse contains a promising sign for us; we will return to our former prominence and we will experience an awakening and a revival in which we will return to the Way of Allah and the straight path. In its midst, we will regain our strength and power, and go on the offensive against the Jews.

His saying '...to disgrace you utterly...' (*al-Isra': 7*). That is to say: We will disgrace them in a way that will leave its mark upon their faces. This is because the face is the distinguishing mark of the human being. The emotions and the feelings are expressed by the countenance and even the last agonies of death experienced by the human soul appear on the face. The face is the noblest part of man and mutilating it is the most abominable form of mutilation.

His saying: '...and to enter the Temple as [their forerunners] had entered it once before...' (*al-Isra': 7*) which means: To be sure, the Muslims will re-enter the Most Remote Mosque and rescue it from the clutches of the Jews '...as

[their forerunners] had entered it once before...' (*al-Isra'*: 7). One who carefully reflects upon this expression will find that the Muslims first entered Al-Aqsa (the Most Remote) Mosque during the reign of Caliph Omar ibn Al-Khattab *may Allah be pleased with him*. During that time the land was not inhabited by Jews; rather, it was under the governance of Roman Christians.

This first entrance inflicted no damage to the Jews. The only affront it contained was for Christians. Nevertheless, this next entrance of Al-Aqsa Mosque will occur while it is in the possession of the Jews and at its core it will contain disgrace—which will be shown on their faces—for the Jews. This will culminate in our entering Al-Aqsa Mosque and cleansing it of their filth.

We also recognize this in His saying, '...as [their forerunners] had entered it once before....' (*al-Isra'*: 7) Without doubt, the Quran would only articulate this reality in such fashion if there was to be an occasion of exiting in between the two entrances.

As such, our latest exit from Al-Aqsa Mosque is the fulfilment of Quranic prophecy. It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to turn to us and proclaim: If you desire to enter the Al-Aqsa Mosque once more, return to the way of your Lord and collectively make amends with Him.

His saying, '...and so, when the prediction of the second [period of your iniquity] came true...' (*al-Isra'*: 7). The word *akhira* implies finality the time after which there will be no repetition; the Jews will never again triumph.

His saying, '...and to destroy with utter destruction all that they had conquered.' (*al-Isra'*: 7) The word *Yutabbiru*: implies that they might raze or destroy in order that they might topple what the Jews had constructed, erected, and built as monuments of their civilization. We presently observe these things among them.

Nevertheless, we observe the wording of the Quran; the Quran does not say 'You raised' but rather, 'They raised' as an indication that that which they raised was not the product of their independent endeavour. Those things the monuments have only accrued because their backing from allies and supporters. Independently, the Jews are essentially weak and are unable to endure. This is clearly expressed in the True Lord's statement: 'Overshadowed by ignominy

are they wherever they may be, save [when they bind themselves again] in a bond with Allah and a bond with men...' (*Al-'Imran*: 112). They are debased wherever they reside. Without protection, this is their lot except when living beneath the shade of a treaty. They are now as they were within the Prophet's era in Medina. Additionally, they experience some comfort when enjoying the protection of others sworn to defend them and cooperate with them.

Jews are an isolated people with an identity and personality which do not meld with others from among the nations. Regardless of the country in which they reside, they do not seek enfranchisement or inclusion into that society's mainstream. This example explains why we find them—in every host country in which they reside—living in areas specifically designated as 'Jewish neighbourhoods'. They are averse to settling down and building community. They are; as He *the Exalted* has mentioned concerning them: 'And We dispersed them as [separate] communities all over the earth...' (*al-A'raf*: 168). Every group among them—throughout the world community—lives in isolation. It is only now, after the establishment of their so-called nation-state in Palestine, we see them inclining toward nation building and founding settlements.

At present, we are awaiting Allah's promise. We live with the hope of seeing our condition rectified so that we can return to our Lord's sanctuary. Only within that sanctuary will the promise of our Lord—that we will re-enter the Most Remote Mosque —be fulfilled, and at last we will have the upper hand on them. When we engage them in a battle whose basis are faith and Islam opposed to Arab nationalism and political partisanship, this promise will be realized. We will have regained our characterization as servants of Allah and as a result we will deserve His assistance.

Accordingly, in so far as the True Lord *Glorified is He* has said, and so, 'when the prediction of the second [period of your iniquity] came true...' (*al-Isra'*: 7). It is a promise that will be fulfilled without doubt. This is evidenced by the fact that this same expression occurs verbatim at the chapter's ending in Allah's words 'And after that We said unto the children of Israel: "Dwell now securely on earth—but [remember that] when the promise of the Last Day shall come to pass, We will bring you forth as [parts of] a motley crowd!"' (*al-Isra'*: 104)

The one who reflects upon this verse finds within it a promising verse signalling the fulfilment of Allah's promise. He also finds within the current assemblage-taking place among the Jews in Palestine, a sign of Allah's Will being done.

The meaning of the verse then, is: after Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* We said to the children of Israel, 'Inhabit the land.' If someone tells you to inhabit any place, they also must specify the place you are to inhabit. For instance, 'inhabit Port Said, inhabit Cairo, or inhabit Jordan', they would say. On the other hand, if someone says to you: inhabit the land what could possibly be intended thereby! This implies that Allah desires for them to remain dispersed throughout the world, separated among the nations. As He has said concerning them 'And We dispersed them as [separate] communities all over the earth...' (*al-A'raf*: 168). Thus, you find them isolated from others, scattered about here and there. Many times, you will find them the source of problems. People raise complaints about them and out of their anguish even murder some of them. He *the Exalted* has mentioned: 'And lo! Your Lord made it known that most certainly He would rouse against them, unto Resurrection Day, people who would afflict them cruel suffering...' (*al-A'raf*: 167).

This is the manner in which the Jews will remain; a nuisance among the earth's citizens, isolated, despised and unwelcome until the Day of Judgment. At the same time, this isolation can also be an element of the formation of good and faith because the people of Islam do not resort to isolation except during a time when Islam needs to be reinvigorated. Afterwards, after the inclination towards faith has been re-instilled, they promptly begin propagating Islam among the people. Therefore, the presence of the Jews as an element of provocation contains wisdom. Its wisdom is that it provokes vital and strengthened faith within our souls, for if faith ceased to be awakened and stirred within us, Islam would fade into oblivion.

This message of theirs is the message of disbelief and falsehood. By its nature then, it must contain wisdom. For the disbelief through which some of mankind suffers turns people to faith, they are unable to perceive tranquillity except through faith in Allah. If it was not for disbelief which vexes people and creates uneasiness in their lives, they would not have turned to faith. The

same can be said of falsehood within creation; it disturbs some people and they consequently turn to the True Lord *Glorified is He* seeking Him.

After Allah caused them to inhabit the land and had dispersed them within it, He incited their supporters from among the 'armies of falsehood.' They inspired them with the idea of establishing a national homeland. Essentially, He had made fair seeming to them the primary steps leading toward their demise. Thus, it was decreed for them to choose Palestine as the place of their undertaking; establishing a national homeland to which they would migrate from various countries.

To be sure, some people viewed the establishment of the nation of Israel and the assembling of the Jews within its territories as a setback for Islam and Muslims. The reality, however; reveals something different. For the True Lord *Glorified is He* desires that we deliver unto them a faithful blow issued by armies described as '...Our Servants...' (*al-Isra'*: 5).

Previously, we alluded to the fact that this blow could not be issued, while they were spread and dispersed throughout the earth; for we could never make war in every part of the world simultaneously. We could never send military detachments to every country in which there is a Jewish area or section of town. How then, could we pursue them, while they were scattered throughout the land in small bands?

Fittingly, the ideas of assemblage and establishing a national homeland which were claimed by the Balfour Declaration and sustained by the major powers throughout the world in support of the Jews and flagrant opposition to the Muslims are in reality services to the cause of Islam. It eases our effort to pursue them and makes it possible to lay siege to them. This explains the meaning of Allah's words: '...when the promise of the Last Day shall come to pass, We will bring you forth as [parts of] a motley crowd!' (*al-Isra'*: 104)

That is to say: we have collected them; we have caused them to converge upon each other. This is therefore a glad tiding for us as Muslims; that the upper hand in the struggle against them will be returned to us and that in the end the triumph will be for Islam and the Muslims. The only barriers we must overcome to realize this promise is returning to Allah and redirecting ourselves toward

Him, as He *Glorified is He* has mentioned: 'yet when the misfortune decreed by Us befell them, they did not humble themselves...' (*al-An'am*: 43).

What is intended by His saying here: 'when the prediction of the second [period of your iniquity]...' (*al-Isra'*: 7). It is the promise that Allah *Glorified is He* has said in its regard: '...And so, when the prediction of the second [period of your iniquity] came true, [We raised new enemies against you, and allowed them] to disgrace you utterly, and to enter the Temple as [their forerunners] had entered it once before...' (*al-Isra'*: 7). The verse is followed by Allah's saying:

عَسَىٰ رَبُّكُمْ أَن يَرْحَمَكُمْ وَإِنْ عُثِرْتُمْ عُذْنَا وَجَعَلْنَا جَهَنَّمَ لِلْكَافِرِينَ حَصِيرًا ﴿٨﴾

Your Lord may yet have mercy on you, but if you do the same again, so shall We: We have made Hell a prison for those who defy [Our warning] [8] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 8)

The word *'asa* is a particle that indicates hope and expectation; it is as though the verse contains a suggestion that they will remain deprived and destitute. No head from among them shall rise except when being shaded by a treaty or contractual agreement from Allah or a treaty from people contracted to support, protect, and assist them.

In His saying 'Your Lord...' (*al-Isra'*: 8). Observe the divine grandeur and The Lord's mercy in the statement which unceasingly addresses the disbelievers, atheists, and those stubbornly rejecting His messenger. He is the last of the heavenly messengers, and despite their rejection of him, Allah addressed all of them with His saying, 'Your Lord...' (*al-Isra'*: 8). This is because the Lord is responsible for mankind's cultivation and the underwriter of those things that make life valuable. He is never sparing in their distribution, even with a disbelieving slave. Thus, all stand upon equal footing in relation to this divine bestowal; the disbeliever and the believer as well as the obedient and the disobedient.

All enjoy the blessings of Allah; the sun, the air, food, and drink. He *Glorified is He* is still their Lord despite all that has resulted from their actions.

In His saying '...may well show mercy unto you...' (*al-Isra'*: 8), mercy is given to the human being if he is in a position in which he deserves mercy.

The Jews will never have an independent nation state or any other political entity. Rather, they live within the divine mercy fostered by Islam which will grant them an opportunity to co-exist among the Muslims in an Islamic environment. This is what they experienced as a community living alongside the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in Medina when he honoured them and enacted a treaty with them.

The level of this co-existence evolved to such an extent that when the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* desired to take out a loan he would not borrow from Muslims. In contrast, he would borrow from the Jews. This contains a wisdom we should be cognizant of: that the Muslims were reserved about demanding their due balances from the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* if he, for instance, failed to remember. On the other hand, a Jew would persistently demand his rights and remind the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* if he overlooked the debt. This explains why the Jews would frequently argue with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and repeatedly sought to involve him in errors. On one occasion⁽¹⁾, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* settled a debt he owed to one of them. However, the man denied it and came requesting that the debt be cleared up a second time. He began to reiterate his request and involve the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* in error. The man rejected that the debt had been cleared up the first time and demanded that witness be brought forward to attest to the fact that debt had already been paid.

There was no witness present during the time in which the debt was settled who could corroborate the Prophet's truthful claim. In this manner, the presence of one of the companions became critical. His name was Khuzayma, and he ascended saying, 'I was a witness O Messenger of Allah, and the Jewish fellow certainly did receive the balance of his outstanding debt.' The Jew maintained his silence without argument or dissent. This suggested that he was not telling the truth. This occurred just as doubt was about to cast its shadow. Nevertheless, after the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* retired with Khuzayma, and the would-be creditor had departed he asked him,

(1) *The story of the Jew who wanted to reimburse his debt to the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him twice unfairly and Khuzayma vouching in favor of the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him.*

‘Khuzayma, what caused you to say such a thing? There was no one with us when I settled the debt with the Jewish fellow.’ Khuzayma laughed and then stated, ‘O Messenger of Allah, I confirm your truthfulness in conveying the reports which emanate from heaven, could I then declare you untruthful in a dispute concerning a paltry sum?’

This effort on behalf of the man pleased the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* so he said, ‘Khuzayma’s testimony suffices whoever is given it on their behalf.’⁽¹⁾

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* threatens the children of Israel; He says ‘...but if you revert [to sinning], We shall revert [to chastising you]...’ (*al-Isra'*: 8). If you return to corruption, we will return to our recompense. This is the punishment within the life of this world, but suffering it will not rescue you from the punishment of the Hereafter. This is one situation and that is another. Thus, we must clarify in order that they do not apprehend that punishment for sin in the life of this world exempts them from punishment in the Hereafter. Worldly punishment only exonerates from future accountability in the Hereafter the perpetrator of wrong action who enjoys the protective hedge of Islam. If this were not so, those guilty of wrong action who were requited with the divinely legislated punishments would be equal in status with those whose actions went unpunished.

If someone commits a theft and consequently has his hand amputated, while someone else commits a theft and goes without having his hand amputated, their suffering equal retribution in the Hereafter would cause one of them to exceed the other in punishment. How could the situation be regarded otherwise, when one individual’s hand was severed, with him being forced to live in ignominy in its aftermath, while the other slipped away reprisal? This is if the guilty party is a believer.

As for a situation in which the commissioner of wrong action is not a believer, the fundamental basis upon which we have been building this case is

(1) Narrated by Al-Hakim in (*Al-Mustadrak*) [2/18] and At-Tabrani in (*Al-M'ujam Al-Kabir*) [4/101]. From the tradition of Khuzaym ibn-Thabit. Haythami mentioned in (*Al-M'ujam*) [9/320], ‘All of its narrators are reliable.’

gone, nowhere to be found. Worldly punishment in this instance does not absolve the perpetrator of wrong action from additional retribution in the Hereafter. This explains the statement of Allah *the Exalted* when he said: '...We have ordained that [in the Hereafter] hell shall close upon all who deny the truth' (*al-Isra'*: 8). *Ja'alna*, which is represented here as we have ordained, it is a verb that indicates transformation. It is as you would say, 'I made (*ja'altu*) the dough into bread.' Or for that matter, 'I made (*ja'altu*) the cotton into a garment'. That is to say, 'I transformed it or I changed it'. So, what was Hell in relation to the disbelievers before the True Lord *Glorified is He* transformed it?

Allah's saying *Ja'alna* in this verse is not indicative of transformation then. The only suitable meaning that can be assigned to it is 'We created'. Which means, We created it in this manner. This is identical in a sense to our saying, 'Glory be unto He who made milk white'. Milk has never been known to exist as any other colour besides white from which it was changed into white by Allah *the Exalted*. Quite the reverse, he created it in that way from the beginning.

The meaning of '...close upon...' (*al-Isra'*: 8) (*hasira*) which is represented here as close upon: is a well known mat made out of straw or from plants referred to as *samr*. They now manufacture them from plastic and they are likewise called *hasira*. This is because the word *hasir* is derived from the word *hasr* which means to constrict things in one place for reinforcement. In manufacturing this mat *hasir*, they press the individual pieces of straw together until it becomes as a firm solid mass without leaving a gap between one piece of straw and the next.

However, why do we use the mat (*hasir*)? We make use of the mat (*hasir*) because it holds off filth and dirt by preventing them from ruining our linens. The meaning of the word *hasr* then is constriction and containment.

The steadfast reader who pursues the meanings attached to the trilateral root (*hasir*) as it is used throughout the text of the Quran finds the following meanings: 'And so when the sacred months are over, slay those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Allah wherever you may come upon them, and take them captive and besiege them...; (*at-Tawba*: 5). That is to say: constrain them.

In relation to the pilgrimage, which is an obligation for Muslims, Allah *the Exalted* has said: '...and if you are held back, give instead whatever you

can easily afford...' (*al-Baqara*: 196). Which in this case means: if you are prevented or barred from performing the rites of The pilgrimage.

Therefore, the statement of Allah *the Exalted*: "...We have ordained that [in the Hereafter] hell shall close upon all who deny the truth" (*al-Isra'*: 8) means restricting their movement not allowing them to leave and containing them therein. For it is an inescapable prison because it encloses them on all sides. In identical fashion, Allah *the Exalted* says: '...Verily, for all who sin against themselves [by rejecting Our Truth] We have readied a fire whose billowing folds⁽¹⁾ will encompass them from all sides...' (*al-Kahf*: 29).

So they are unable to escape, if they try to mount an escape they are forced back into its confines. As Allah *the Exalted* says: '...as oft as they try to come out of it, they will be thrown back into it...' (*as-Sajda*: 20).

Within His saying: '...We have ordained that [in the Hereafter] hell shall close upon all who deny the truth' (*al-Isra'*: 8) is an indication that in order to perpetrate the criminal acts they commit in the life of this world, they need the assistance of their aids and supports from among the powerful. By this means, they enter the fosterage of the people of falsehood, as for in the Hereafter, they will not find any defenders or supporters.

Allah *the Exalted* says: "How is it that [now] you cannot succour one another?" Nay, but on that Day they would willingly surrender [to Allah]' (*as-Saffat*: 25-26).

After the True Lord *Glorified is He* concluded his discussion on the Night Journey of the Final Prophet of Mercy, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, He made it a terrestrial verse that could be evidenced although it superseded the natural laws with which his people were accustomed. This was

(1) *Ibn Al-'Aarabi interpreted (suradiq) to mean 'Its gates.'* The narration on Ibn-Abbas authority mentions a wall of fire. Al-Kalbi mentioned, 'that it is a part of the fire which encircles the disbelievers as though they are in a pen. Ibn Al-Mubarak takes his conclusion from the Hadith which is narrated by Abu-Said Al-Khudri that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said 'Every gate of the Fire is made up of four walls. The Thickness of each wall would take someone walking forty years to clear it.' Within his work of *Quranic exegesis* [5/4123] Al-Qurtubi said, 'this indicates that the gates are billows of smoke and fire that tower above the disbelievers, the actual wall of hell was not described.'

established so that when the occurrence of The Ascension—which also superseded the natural laws of creation, but in relation to that which is unknown to human beings—is announced, it is even more worthy of being believed.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then goes on to clarify that it was in fact Muhammad's submission to his Lord that caused him to be granted such immense rank. And so was Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* a grateful servant. So, there is a contrast between the servitude of people to Allah and their servitude of some of them to others. This is because to be enslaved to a creature is despicable; the master reaps the benefit of the slave's labour. On the other hand, when one is enslaved to Allah, the slave reaps the benefit of the master.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* discusses the children of Israel and the corruption they succumbed to within their dealings. With that, He gave us examples of those that conduct themselves excellently and those that comport themselves wickedly. Each is rewarded the outcome of his action without being oppressed or wronged.

This explains why the Quranic context directs us to a clarification of the Divine Way which descended from on high to make clear how the human being realizes servitude to his Lord and to clarify how to be a sincere slave to Allah *the Exalted*. The True Lord *Glorified is He* then moves on to state:

إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ يَهْدِي لِلَّتِي هِيَ أَقْوَمُ وَيُبَشِّرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ الَّذِينَ
يَعْمَلُونَ الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ أَجْرًا كَبِيرًا ﴿٩﴾

This Quran does indeed show the straightest way. It gives the faithful who do right the good news that they will have a great reward and [9] (The Quran, *al-Isra*: 9)

Whoever desires a consummate example of servitude to Allah needs to look no further than the servitude displayed by the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It was this servitude that caused him to be carried by night to Jerusalem and then subsequently raised to the heavens. Whoever desires to take on the likeness of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* within his servitude to his Lord and honour his descendants thereby must

proceed according to how they proceeded and follow their patterns of conduct in servitude. Additionally, he must be cautious not to assume the likeness of the Jews who twice made mischief in the land.

The Noble Quran is that which illustrates and explains the truth for us making it distinct from falsehood 'Verily, this Quran shows the way to all that is most upright...' (*al-Isra'*: 9). The statement of the True Lord *the Exalted* 'Indeed, this Quran...' (*al-Isra'*: 9). At the time of this revelation, had the entire Quran been revealed? As is readily understood from his saying: Indeed, this Quran? We respond by stating, that the Quran in its entirety had yet to be revealed. However, every verse of the Quran is referred to as Quran, as Allah *the Exalted* has said: 'Thus, when We recite it, follow you its wording [with all Your mind]' (*al-Qiyama*: 18).

So, the entire Quran is not what is being intended here. Rather, a verse from the Quran is Quran. It follows that, at the time that the revelation was completed and the questions upon which the ability to lead an upright life are hinged were answered Allah *the Exalted* said '...Today I perfected my blessings, and willed that self-surrender unto Me shall be your religion...' (*al-Ma'ida*: 3).

If some deluded seeker of nobility seeks to make additions to the Book of Allah or advance something new, he should be aware that the Way of Allah is far-removed from ever containing deficiencies and is thus, in absolutely no need of his additions. There is nothing required of you besides searching in the Book of Allah, you will find the good to which you incline. The Quran according to His saying, '...shows the way...' (*al-Isra'*: 9).

Guidance is the path that leads to the objective in the most expedient and efficient manner. It is the straight path in which there is no crookedness. We stated that the True Lord *Glorified is He* guides all people and clearly illustrates for them the Way. Whoever takes heed and is guided, is subsequently increased by Allah in guidance, as Allah *Glorified is He* has mentioned, 'just as for those who are [willing to be] guided, He increases their [ability to follow His] guidance and causes them to grow in God-consciousness.' (*Muhammad*: 17)

The meaning of the phrase '...most upright...' (*al-Isra'*: 9) is explained as: more upright and an experience of more peace. This literary pattern, i.e. the figure of speech being employed here is called 'the verb of superlative expression.'

Therefore, the way have the word upright (*aqwam*), and the word *qayim* which is lesser than it is. In like manner, we would say knowing (*'alim*) and (*a'lam*) or more knowing. So, His *Glorified is He* saying: 'Verily, this Quran shows the way to all that is most upright...' (*al-Isra': 9*).

This suggests the presence of a plainly upright way of conducting affairs in peoples' civil planning and codes of positive law. The True Lord has not prohibited humans from enjoying the protections of positive legal codes when confronted by oppression which they would be forced to unhappily endure if they failed to enact laws to redress those wrongs.

There is no objection to this, if nothing detailing how to handle the matter from the Way of Allah has been revealed to them from Him. So, if what they legislate is upright (*qayyim*), what Allah has brought forward is more upright (*aqwam*). Additionally, you do not introduce the upright until after you have been exposed to the crooked, the warped. If not this exposure, then what has turned your attention to the upright?

As for the Heavenly Way, it endows us with the means to protect against and prevent the root causes of illness. There is a stark difference between the prevention of illness and curing illness. Positive law provides mechanisms for curing the social ills that afflict the community.

In terms of Islam, it provides us with a means of protection. If the Muslims slip into heedlessness or are badly affected by some ailments, it is the result of their deviation from the Way of their Lord. To them, we say: 'Return to the Way at once!' 'Verily, this Quran shows the way to all that is most upright...' (*al-Isra': 9*).

In order to explain that the Way of Allah is more upright, we narrate what we experienced in San Francisco. Indeed, one of the orientalist⁽¹⁾ questioned us concerning the verse of the True Lord *the Exalted*: 'They want to extinguish Allah's [guiding] light with their utterances: but Allah will not allow [this to pass], for He has willed to spread His light in all its fullness, however hateful this may be to all who deny the truth.' (*at-Tawba: 32*)

(1) *The story of the San Francisco orientalist who asked Ash-Sheikh about how Islam overshadowed all other regions.*

In another verse, He says: 'He it is who has sent forth His Apostle with the [task of spreading] guidance and the religion of truth, to the end that He may cause it to prevail over all [false] religion – however hateful this may be to those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Allah.' (*at-Tawba*: 33)

How did the Quran say: '... to the end that he may cause it to prevail over all [false religion]' (*at-Tawba*: 33) when undeniably, Islam is now kept within bounds, and other religious traditions are currently excelling it in terms of number of adherents? I responded to him, 'If you reflect closely upon the verse you will find that it addresses your question. For the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '...however hateful this may be to all those who deny the truth.' (*at-Tawba*: 32) He also states: '...however hateful this may be to those who ascribe divinity to other than Allah.' (*at-Tawba*: 33)

Hence, the disbelievers and the idolaters were present. In other words, the prevalence being referred to here is not materialized through having plenteous followers. The Quran did not say that all people would become believers.

The meaning of prevail here is the confirmation of the truth of Islam, and (the meeting of) needs and a prevalence that is manifest in providing law and order. Life's trials and tribulations will compel them to cast aside their legal codes and adopt the laws of Islam because within it they will find the goal of their persistent search.

Take for instance, the much criticized and maligned divorce law of Islam, which they claimed contained things unbefitting to the matrimonial bond. However, with the passage of time, the painful truth began to reveal itself and many from among them suffered from the absence of this solution within their legal codes. In this manner, marital strife forced them to resort to drafting legislation to deal with divorce.

It is well known, that indeed, their enacting laws to settle divorce cases was not motivated by a love for Islam nor contentment with it as a belief system; rather, they were beset with problems that could only be resolved with divorce. This is the prevalence that is intended in the two noble verses. It is a prevalence that you all can attest to, for you will be forced to resort to the laws of Islam or something that resembles them to resolve the problems with which you are confronted.

The prohibition of usury in Islam is also one of these matters. Once again, they opposed and denounced this prohibition until Keynes⁽¹⁾, who is their leading economist came and announced to them: pay close attention because money does not perform its most complete function unless the interest rates are reduced to zero. Glory be unto Allah, the obstinacy of these people in their opposition to Islam is unfathomable. Does the prohibition of usury mean anything besides reducing the interest rates to zero? To be sure, they return to the Way of Allah in spite of themselves and nonetheless still refuse to acknowledge it.

The negative effects of dealing in usurious policies are not hidden. Have we seen one country which borrowed from another able to completely square its debt or merely pay the interest instalments not to speak of the principal of the loan? Then, we see them in error saying: Germany and Japan took loans after WWII and this was the path of their development and progress. We respond to them by saying: Indeed, you have been duped. Germany and Japan did not receive interest bearing loans, they only received aid that was non-interest bearing. This aid was referred to as the Marshall Plan.⁽²⁾

Also, from among those things which the trials and tribulations of life forced them to resort to, is the inheritance of women. After they were troubled by this matter, they enacted laws to deal with it. Accordingly, the prevalence of the Religion of Allah being referred to here is the elevation of order and laws which they are forced to adopt to meet life's demands. The prevalence being referred to here is not displayed by having an abundance of followers.

Consequently, the Way of Allah is more upright. The laws of the True Lord *Glorified is He* are greater and offer more guidance than the laws of human beings. The contents of the Quran make it sufficiently clear that the judgment of Allah as well as His laws are the most upright of all judgments

(1) John Maynard Keynes, 1st Baron Keynes (5 June 1883 – 21 April 1946), was a British economist whose ideas fundamentally changed the theory and practice of macroeconomics and the economic policies of governments. He built on and greatly refined earlier work on the causes of business cycles, and is widely considered to be one of the most influential economists of the 20th century and the founder of modern macroeconomics. His ideas are the basis for the school of thought known as Keynesian economics and its various offshoots.

(2) The Marshall plan was a legislation instituted by the U.S government to aid countries that were decimated by WWII, specifically it offered financial aid to boost economies of Western European countries.

and laws. In fact, they are even more upright than the judgment His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*.

This is expressed in the story⁽¹⁾ of his client, Zayd ibn-Haritha.⁽²⁾ Zayd *may Allah be pleased with him* was not a slave until some slave traders abducted him and sold him into slavery. His rounds came to conclusion under the ownership of Lady Khadija *may Allah be pleased with her* who in her role as his owner placed him at the service of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. So Zayd *may Allah be pleased with him* was in the service of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* until his family learned of his presence in Mecca. Soon after, his family came to reclaim him. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was left with no recourse besides allowing him to choose to remain with him or to go with his family. Zayd *may Allah be pleased with him* preferred to remain in the service of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* rather than return to his family. After that, He said, 'It is inappropriate for me to choose anything over he who has chosen me.'⁽³⁾

This story contains evidence that slavery was permissible at that time. In fact, slavery was an institution of mercy and compassion. The slave lived as his master lived; eating from the same food, drinking from the same drink, and wearing the same clothes. Moreover, the master was not to assign the slave work beyond his capacity and if he did assign the slave difficult labour he was to assist him: the slave and master were hand in hand.⁽⁴⁾

(1) *The story of Zayd ibn-Haritha may Allah be pleased with him with his people and with the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him*

(2) *He is Zayd ibn-Haritha ibn-Sharahil Al-Kalbi, the Companion. He was abducted while in his youth and purchased by Khadija bint-Khuwaylid may Allah be pleased with her who presented him to the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him after he married her. He then adopted him and granted him his freedom. Eventually he married him to his cousin. He made him a leader during the battle of Mu'ta, in which he was martyred. He died in the 8th year after the Hijrah.*

(3) *Narrated by Ibn-Hajar Al-'Asqalani within a text entitled (al-Isaba fi Tamyiz As-Sahaaba). Bio # 2884 under the title Zayd ibn-Haritha Al-Kalbi*

(4) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) [6050] and Muslim in his (Sahih) [1661] within the narration of Abu Dharr may Allah be pleased with him which states that the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said to him, 'They are your brothers whom Allah has placed under your jurisdiction. So feed them from what you eat, clothe them from what you wear, and do not assign them to work which is overwhelming. If you do so (assign them to work which is overwhelming) assist them in it.'*

This describes the connection that existed between Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Zayd *may Allah be pleased with him*. Unsurprisingly, this is what caused him to choose to remain in the service of the Messenger instead of going with his family. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* thought it would be fitting to reward Zayd *may Allah be pleased with him* for the pure commitment he had displayed when he chose him over his family, so he said, 'No longer refer to him as Zayd ibn-Haritha. Rather, call him Zayd ibn-Muhammad.'⁽¹⁾

Adoption was widespread at that time. So when the True Lord *Glorified is He* desired to proscribe adoption (the actual laying claim to parentage of a child birthed to some else) and thereby prohibit a child from being included in the lineage of anyone besides his own father, he began with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. He said: '[As for your adopted children,] call them by their [real] fathers' names: this is more equitable in the sight of Allah; and if you know not who their fathers were, [call them] your brethren in faith and your friends...' (*al-Ahzab*: 5).

What concerns us here is: '...this is more equitable in the sight of Allah...' (*al-Ahzab*: 5). So it is as though the judgment that effectively suspended adoption upon the above stated meaning and returned to Zayd his former title of Zayd ibn-Haritha was more just and equitable. Correspondingly, the judgment of the Messenger was not wrong, rather, we should conclude that it was just and

(1) *This is expressed in the Prophetic Hadith in which the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Be witnesses to this testimony: Zayd is my son. I will inherit him and he will inherit me.'* Narrated by Ibn-Hajar Al-'Asqalani, (*Al-Isaba fi tamyiz As-Sahaba*). Bio # 2884. He was called Zayd ibn Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* up until the statement of Allah the Exalted was revealed '[As for your adopted children,] call them by their [real] fathers' names: this is more equitable in the sight of Allah...' (*al-Ahzab*: 5). Afterwards, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* wed him to his paternal cousin Zaynab bint Jahsh, not long after the revelation proclaimed 'And Lo, [O Muhammad,] you did say unto the one to whom Allah had shown favour and to whom you hadst shown favour, "Hold on to your wife, and remain conscious of Allah!" And [thus] would you hide within yourself something that Allah was about to bring to light- for you did stand in awe off[what] people [might think], whereas it was Allah alone of whom you should have stood awe! [But] then, when Zayd had come to the end of his union wither, We gave her to you in marriage, so that [in future] no blame should attach to the believers for [marrying] the spouses of their adopted children when the latter have come to the end of their union with them. And [thus] Allah's will was done' (*al-Ahzab*: 37).

equitable. Nonetheless, it was justice and equity based on human reckoning. That which the True Lord *Glorified is He* has excelled it.

In this manner, Zayd *may Allah be pleased with him* was returned to his original lineage. People began saying, 'Zayd ibn-Haritha' which caused Zayd great sadness because he was now barred from being affiliated with the noble lineage of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, Allah *the Exalted* counterbalanced that by granting him a merit which no other companion attained. This merit was having his name mentioned in the Noble Quran. People had begun reciting his name and worshipping Allah with it in His saying: '...[But] then, when Zayd had come to the end of his union wither, We gave her to you in marriage...' (*al-Ahzab*: 37). In other words, the course of action taken by the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was equitable: Allah's course of action was more equitable. His *the Exalted* saying: '...shows the way to all that is most upright...' (*al-Isra'*: 9).

The one who pursues the Quranic methodology finds that it unfailingly presents us with the most just, equitable, and balanced ways of proceeding in all things, this includes: creed, law, and stories. In creed, for example, Islam came to decisively settle a dispute between a community in contradiction. Some of them disavow the existence of a deity in the process of creation and others claim the existence of multiple deities. The arrival of Islam represented the middle course between the two extremes. It settled the question by presenting the most upright resolution, 'There is only one God Who is without partner'; this it came to declare.

Furthermore, when it discussed the attributes of this God (Allah) *Glorified is He*, it also adopted a more balanced, more upright course. So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* possesses attributes which are reflected by human beings; His hand, His hearing, His sight. However, His hand is nothing like our hands, His hearing is nothing like our hearing, His sight is nothing like our sight. 'The Originator [is He] of the heavens and the earth. He has given you mates of your own kind just as [He has willed that] among the beasts [there be] mates – to multiply you thereby: [but] there is nothing like unto Him, and He alone is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.' (*ash-Shura*: 11)

This wise divine guidance refutes the allegation that the Attributes of Allah are like the attributes of human beings. It also leaves no room for the other extreme view that Allah does not possess these Attributes and the words referring to these Attributes should be interpreted to carry subtle meanings other than their linguistic denotations.

The Quran also instructs us to engage in a general observation of Allah's creation: 'And there are many signs in the heavens and the earth that they pass by and give no heed to' (*Yusuf*: 105). It directs our attention to the many wonders of creation of which we are heedless, the signs we neglect instead of ponder. Pondering the miraculous signs of Allah's creation remind us of the Creator's Magnificence and meanwhile opens for us new channels that help make life more prosperous. Conscious reflection on the wonders of creation can be our way to explore much of life's splendour.

Allah has created in the universe the means and resources required to keep life going. Out of His Mercy, He has provided us with all the basic needs essential for the continuation of our existence. Whosoever then desires welfare must employ his intellect to explore the treasures and secrets Allah has endowed the universe with and use them in the right way to achieve what he desires.

Examples of this are numerous. Many people have been guided to reflect on the universe. They have made discoveries and breakthroughs that served humanity and made life easier in many aspects. Invention of the wheel was a great one. The inventor found out that heavy loads were transported with greater facility when something capable of moving in a circular motion was placed beneath them. Reflection on this phenomenon led to that valuable invention that has made life far easier. This can also be said about the steam engine. The inventor may have discovered the locomotive power of steam when he found it capable of raising the lid of a boiling pot. This perhaps guided him to the idea of using steam to power means of transportation and heavy machines. The discovery of penicillin was a huge scientific breakthrough. It is owed to the precious chance by which the discoverer saw a green mould that caused inhibition of bacterial growth. The discoverer perhaps by chance had that mould contact his eyes where he had been experiencing some

inflammation, so the mould caused his eyes to heal⁽¹⁾. This led to the discovery of this medication that changed the history of medicine.

Wonders and secrets of Allah's creation are endless. We just ignorantly neglect them. We pass by them, but instead of reflecting those signs, we just turn aside from them.

Those scientists and others were able to have a profound impact on human life because of their penetrating insight. They employed their intellects to explore and benefit from the creation of Allah. They did not bring to existence something totally new, but they only uncovered what Allah has created in the universe. When Allah created humankind to be vicegerents on earth, He prepared for them the necessary means of subsistence and basic requirements for preserving their life and kind. Besides guaranteeing basic needs, Allah has endowed the universe with unending resources that man can use to achieve welfare as well. Such resources require us to employ our minds to make good use of them.

Moreover, Allah says: '... It was He Who brought you into being from the earth and *esta'marakum* (made you inhabit) it...' (*Hud*: 61). The word *esta'mara* does not just mean 'to inhabit' but also to make the place where you exist prosperous and thriving. Thus, Allah has brought us to earth for a mission that requires collaboration between the various talents and powers He has gifted us with. We need all to work in concert. Life would not be set to rights when each destroys what the other builds. We are ordained to collaborate, not conflict. To let our powers and efforts complement each other, not destroy each other through unhealthy rivalry. To achieve this, the only way is to follow the divine guidance which is absolutely wise and just. Allah says: 'It is Allah who has sent down the Scripture with Truth and the Balance...' (*ash-Shura*: 17).

There is a point worth underlining. Allah has made the universe for us all to share and commanded us to explore its wonders and delve into its secrets. Meanwhile, He strictly forbids us from prying on the secrets and private lives

(1) This information is according to the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Sha'rawi *Allah rest his soul*, and it was stated by him to further clarify certain points, but it does not necessarily conform to the scientific facts and information proven true. [Reviewer's Note]

of one another. The world belongs to us all, but the private life of everyone belongs to him only. The ordinance of Allah has been sent down with Mercy. It aims at enriching human life and preserving the rights of all. Respecting each other's privacy serves a good purpose: maintaining healthy relationships among people. One may be generally good, yet may have a secret defect or failure he cannot overcome. By prying into his life, we may find out about that hidden imperfection and because of it, wipe out all the good qualities of that person, and block before him every channel through which he can be useful to himself or society. Violation of the privacy of others can thus be excessively harmful to the object of that violation and society at large. Attempting to explore the secrets of others would entail wronging them by exposing them to censure or disdain or blocking opportunities before them. This is a general principle for all, for just as Allah forbids you from prying on others, He enjoins on others to respect your privacy too. Indeed one of the most precious blessings Allah has granted us is that He only is the Knower of secrets. He is our Lord and Creator Who covers our secrets out of His Mercy and Bounty. As for people, they are generally wanting in such elevation, so they would only criticize rather than sympathize and expose whatever they know about the private failures of one another rather than keep them private.

Allah wants us to be in a continuous process of useful exchange which cannot be attained except through honourable competition to build civilization and make life more prosperous, seeking by this to please Allah and win His reward: '... Let those who strive, strive for this' (*al-Mutaffifin*: 26). Like students in a classroom, we should engage in an honest competition to excel over one another. Competition here is not one based on animosity, envy, hatred or gloating at the misfortunes of others. Quite the reverse, it is based on mutual respect and wishing others success just as one wishes it for himself. This is what Allah urges us to do.

In some instances, one's enemy may be the very person that causes him to keep moving forward. We generally look on enemies as an unmixed source of evil and harm from which no good may be expected. Let us look, however, at Allah's Wisdom in bringing forth that enemy. An enemy can be even more useful than a friend! The latter may flatter you into thinking you have no

imperfections to overcome. Your enemy, on the other hand, lies in wait for the slightest mistake or failure on your part to find fault with you or defeat you. He is anxious for your slightest misstep so that he can expose you. Knowing this, one may be well motivated to avoid even slipping not to give his enemy an advantage over him. Also, one would always love to outdo his enemy in doing good, which would push him to be an assiduous seeker of success in this realm. A poet has expressed this meaning in the following superb verses:

My enemies confer on me such a favour!

May Allah always keep them by my side!

They seek my failures and envy my glamour,

So I make my successes ever more bright!

If we consider everything from a positive perspective, we will see the wisdom of Allah behind it. Fruitful competition enriches life, which contains evidence that Allah's guidance is the most upright and suitable way to govern life. Furthermore, to maintain equality and peace, there must be laws that protect the vulnerable from the unmitigated force of the powerful. This is why Allah has prescribed punishment for every crime to preserve the rights of everyone and protect them against the transgression of others. Besides establishing justice through setting clear laws and rulings, Allah leaves the door of clemency open and encourages forgiveness among people. He warns the powerful against transgression, to avoid punishment on one hand, and avoid oppression themselves in case they in turn become the weak party. Power is not inherent in any mortal. It is a gift from Allah that he may remove any time. Everything in this life is temporary; both power and weakness will come to an inevitable end. Remember that Allah protects the weak from your power now and will protect your weakness from the power of others tomorrow. Does all this not bear testimony to the fact that Allah's religion indeed shows the straightest way of life?

Another aspect of perfection in Islam is so obviously seen in the laws it sets for spending. We are cautioned against both extravagance and niggardliness. Love of finery is intrinsic to the natural disposition of humankind. Everyone

would like to raise his standard of living and enjoy the elegance of luxury. This is unattainable to one who frivolously squanders his income and saves nothing of it. One has to make balance in his spending to have enough savings to enhance his life by affording luxuries for himself and his family as well as securing its necessities. This wise strategy is expressed in these words of Allah where He praises His truly devout servants: 'They are those who are neither wasteful nor niggardly when they spend, but keep to a just balance' (*al-Furqan*: 67). Allah also says: 'Do not be tight-fisted, nor so open-handed that you end up blamed and overwhelmed with regret' (*al-Isra'*: 29). Throughout his life, one experiences a medley of unending aspirations. This is especially true in this modern age when life is so rife with temptations. No sooner does one reach a goal than he starts reaching for a greater one. This necessarily requires spending one's energy as well as resources wisely so he can achieve his goals. Just as Islam forbids extravagance, it also forbids tight-fistedness. A miser is disliked even by his own family and children. Miserliness breeds stagnation and idleness and therefore causes the entire society to decline, for a miser tightly clings to his money and does not employ it in the exchange process by which people's businesses thrive. Rather, he contributes to recession by abstention from buying. A miser is an inert element of society who, by his behaviour aggravates social ailments, which makes his presence loathsome to everyone.

Extravagance and miserliness are undesirable characteristics and are both equally harmful. The best behaviour is to commit oneself to a middle course. This is the straightest way to which Allah commands us to adhere.

Moderation is not only recommended in spending, but also in the sphere of eating and drinking. Allah illustrates for us the balanced way that preserves health and wellness and protects us from illness. He says: '... Eat and drink [freely], but do not waste: verily, He does not love the wasteful' (*al-A'raf*: 31). Islam recommends that we eat and drink just as much as is required to build the energy the body needs to function. It cautions against excessiveness in this regard to gain the benefits of food and avoid drawbacks.

Consuming too much food has accumulating side effects that appear as one ages. If one fails at youth to control his eating habits, he must pay for it as

he progresses in years. You would find a wealthy master who owns a fancy house and a complete staff of servants, yet he cannot enjoy the foods his poor servants enjoy! Having exceeded reasonable limits when young, he has no choice but to obey his doctor who restricts him to quite limited food choices. True are the words of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as he said, 'Eat, drink, give to charity and dress (as you like) but without extravagance or showiness.'⁽¹⁾

Of the guidance of Islam is that it teaches us how to maintain this balance is to eat only when hungry. Doing otherwise would exhaust the stomach and cause damage and sickness. Besides, one finds delight in food when they are hungry. Hunger makes any food delicious, even a dry piece of bread.

Thus, in every respect, Allah's Guidance shows us the straightest way. It is the way that ensures a life of wellbeing and peace and the best disposition of all our affairs. The wisdom and uprightness of this divine guidance shows clearly in every aspect of its creed, rituals, ethics, and laws governing dealings among people. It has set the broad principles for managing life and has left nothing unsettled, as Allah says: '... We have not neglected anything in the Book...' (*al-An'am*: 38). Allah's Guidance contains the most upright way, and how could it be otherwise when it is the way of the Creator Who knows what He has created and knows what is good for them. To Him belongs the Highest Similitude, yet I always like giving this example for further illustration. An inventor is the one who can provide instructions for efficient operation and maintenance of his invention. Following those instructions helps an operator avoid misuse or breakdown. Likewise- even though Allah is above all comparison, He Who has created us knows best what sets our lives straight and makes us prosper. This is why He has sent down to us his commands and prohibitions. 'Does He not know, Who created? And He is the Knower of the subtleties, the Aware' (*al-Mulk*: 14). What brings difficulties and misfortunes on people in this life is that they voluntarily abandon the guidance of Him Who has made them and govern their lives by laws set by

(1) Cited by Imam Ahmad in his *Musnad* (2/181-182), Ibn Majah in his *Sunan* (3605) and *An-Nasa'i* in his *Sunan* (5/79), on the authority of Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn Al-'As, Allah be pleased with both.

fallible mortals like them. These are contrived and limited laws that, in any case, can never match the loftiness and wisdom of the laws set by *the Almighty* Creator. There is no room for comparison between the two. Therefore, life cannot be set straight unless we abide by the Way of Allah.

Allah then says in the same verse: ‘... It gives the faithful who do right the good news that they will have a great reward’ (*al-Isra*: 9). Obedience to the Creator means peace and uprightness in this life. A believing heart derives security from faith in his Almighty, All-Merciful Lord. Furthermore, Allah gives His devout servants good news of a reward far superior to this: deliverance and eternal bliss in the Hereafter. The believers thus reap the fruits of true faith both in the life of this world and in the Hereafter.

Allah has created us and created life, so it is logical that whoever acts upon His guidance enjoys peace and success in life. Allah says: ‘... When guidance comes from Me, as it certainly will, there will be no fear for those who follow My guidance nor will they grieve’ (*al-Baqara*: 38). He says in another verse: ‘... Whoever follows My guidance, when it comes to you [people], will not go astray nor fall into misery’ (*Ta Ha*: 123). Allah also says: ‘To whoever, male or female, does good deeds and has faith, We shall give a good life and reward them according to the best of their actions’ (*an-Nahl*: 97).

So this is what the believers expect in this life and the Afterlife. On the other hand, Allah says about the disbelievers: ‘But whoever turns away from it will have a life of great hardship. We shall bring him blind to the Assembly on the Day of Resurrection and he will say, “Lord, why did You bring me here blind? I was sighted before!” Allah will say, “This is how it is: You ignored Our revelations when they came to you, so today you will be ignored.”’ (*Ta Ha*: 124-126) Just as Allah rewards His believing servants, both in their life and the one to come, He also makes the disbelievers taste the outcomes of their disobedience in this life before they are given their due recompense in the Afterlife. There is no injustice in the case. Exalted is He above injustice. Rather, this is their fair recompense for treating the signs and revelations of Allah with neglect and derision.

Back to the verse we are reflecting on; Allah says: ‘... the faithful who do right...’ (*al-Isra*: 9). To do *as-salehat* rendered here as (do right) means

increasing the good already existing in things or at least retaining the good in them and not corrupting it. So Allah promises those who believe and do good '... that they will have a great reward' (*al-Isra'*: 9). It is worthy of notice that Allah describes their reward as *kabir* (great) and does not use the comparative form *akbar* (greater). The use of *kabir* (great) is more expressive, for it gives the impression that this reward is matchless indeed. If Allah used the word *akbar* (greater) which is used in the case of comparison, this would give the impression that their reward is great, yet there are others who will receive great rewards too, even if less than theirs. This is what the use of the comparative form conveys in Arabic. It denotes a comparison between things all sharing the stated adjective, but with different degrees. On the other hand, the word *kabir* (great) denotes no comparison. It means that all, apart from the thing it describes, is just the opposite: 'small', "little," etc. This precision confirms the grandeur of the reward Allah has prepared for the believers who do right, and such is the eloquence of the language of the Quran.

As we have previously pointed out, *Al-Kabir* (The Great) is one of the Names of Allah. As for *Akbar* (greater), however, it is not among His Names, but only a modifier sometimes associated with His Name to convey particular meanings. As we said, using the comparative form implies that other things are comparable to that modified by the adjective. Undoubtedly, this does not apply to Allah: He is "The Great"; all Greatness belongs to Him and all but Him have no share whatever of greatness.

In the Call to the prayer (*adhan*), we hear the caller announce *Allahu Akbar* which literally translates as: 'Allah is Greater. However, the meaning intended by this sentence is: observing your duty to Allah by performing the prayer (*salat*) is greater than any worldly gain. Use of the comparative form is meant to imply that some worldly activities can be described as 'great' in the sense that they also entail reward in the Hereafter. Still, observing the prayer is greater.

Doing one's duty to Allah requires physical strength which is derived from possessing the basic needs of life; food, clothing, etc. Thus, even seeking worldly gains, in this sense, meanwhile contributes to the Hereafter. People of understanding therefore intend by whatever they do to draw closer to Allah

and their deeds contribute both to the life of this world and the Afterlife. In the Quran, Allah hints at the necessity of worldly activities and their importance in assisting a Muslim along his journey to Allah. He says about the *Jumu'a* (Friday) Prayer: '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— then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out Allah's bounty. Remember Allah often so that you may prosper' (*al-Jumu'a*: 9-10). Allah mentions 'trading' in particular, for it is the kind of business that involves immediate reward. Moreover, it is quite tempting that other kinds of business. A seller just needs an eligible buyer to almost immediately replace his commodity by money. The command to leave off trading implies that other kinds of business are even more worthy of being left off.

So, observing *salat* (prayer) has a greater priority over any worldly activities. Allah calls us to gather in His house (the mosque) to stand before Him, pray to Him and derive spiritual strength that will help us resume our worldly activities with assiduity and sincerity. When the prayer is concluded, we are ordered to return to our activities and seek out provisions. Thus, work is *kabir* (great), yet *salat* (prayer) is *akbar* (greater), hence *Allahu Akbar* in the call to the prayer. Allah says in the following verse:

وَأَنَّ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ أَعْتَدْنَا لَهُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا ﴿١٠﴾

**Warns that We have prepared an agonizing punishment
for those who do not believe in the world to come [10]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 10)**

This verse is an extension of the previous one. Allah says: '... It gives the faithful who do right the good news that they will have a great reward' (*al-Isra'*: 9). Then says: 'and warns that We have prepared an agonizing punishment for those who do not believe in the world to come' (*al-Isra'*: 10). Here we have one subject 'it'- mentioned in the previous verse- and two verbs: 'give'" in the first verse and 'warns' in the second. The subject 'it' has been repeated in the translation of the second verse only for clarification. In the Arabic text, the verb *bashshir* is used in the first verse yet its meaning

extends to include both verses. This verb literally means 'to give good news of'. The first verse does bear good news of reward for the believers. Still, the second verse gives news of punishment to the disbelievers, so how can this be treated as 'good news'? Sure punishment is not good news, but Allah announces it using the verb *bashshir* to produce a sarcastic effect. This style is used in other verses of the Quran, like: '... *fabashshirhum* (give them [good] news of) grievous suffering' (*at-Tawba*: 34). Allah also says: 'Taste this, you powerful, respected man!' (*ad-Dukhan*: 49) This verse is also sarcastic, for the disbelievers in the Hereafter will be neither powerful nor respected. This is like telling an idle student who has failed his exams, 'I would like to congratulate you on your failure!' Or, 'Let me give you the good news of your failure!'

The use of the verb *bashshir* (give good news of) may be also interpreted in another way. It may be considered in the sense that the news of punishment- even though bad news for the disbelievers- is actually good news to the believers, just as the news of reward for them is too. The news of paradise delights the believers as it gives them knowledge of the Bounty of their Lord they are to expect in the Hereafter. Likewise, the news of punishment to the disbelievers is good news to the believers, for it makes them thankful that they have not fallen prey to the snares of disbelief. Meanwhile, it deters anyone against deviating from the Straight Path, which is also a favour and a mercy from Allah, and hence the good news.

This meaning is also conveyed through the following verse: 'He is Lord of the two risings and Lord of the two settings. Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? He released the two bodies of [fresh and salt] water. They meet, yet there is a barrier between them they do not cross. Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? Pearls come forth from them: large ones and small, brilliant ones which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? His are the moving ships that float, high as mountains, on the sea. Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?' (*ar-Rahman*: 17-25) These verses of the Quran speak about blessings Allah has bestowed on us from His Bounty. It is appropriate, then, that Allah concludes each verse with: 'which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you deny?'

However, Allah says afterwards in the same chapter: 'A flash of fire and smoke will be released upon you and no one will come to your aid. Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?' (*ar-Rahman*: 35-36) What type of blessing is there to have 'a flash of fire and smoke be released upon us'? It is a blessing indeed! This verse, when considered with precision, contains one of the most precious blessings Allah has bestowed on us; namely, that He sends punishment to deter the disobedient and meanwhile gratify and appease the obedient.

Allah says in the following verse, speaking about the nature of human conduct:

وَيَدْعُ الْإِنْسَانُ بِالشَّرِّ دُعَاءَهُ بِالْخَيْرِ وَكَانَ الْإِنْسَانُ عَجُولًا ﴿١١﴾

**Yet man prays for harm, just as he prays for good:
man is ever hasty [11] (The Quran, *al-Isra*: 11)**

The word *yad'u* (prays) means to beseech one capable of assisting you concerning a matter over which you have no power. Arabic grammarians classify imperative verbs into categories. The first is that of commands. A command is that given by a superior to his subordinate. Every request made by Allah to his creation is a command. The other category is that of requests. These are issued by one to his peers. it is taken to be solicitude or an appeal. Finally, if the request is issued by an inferior to his superior, like that made by a servant to his Lord, this is called *du'a'* (prayers; supplication).

The Arabic language is so keen on using terms that show reverence for Allah *the Exalted*. Thus, if we analyse the verb used in this sentence, for example, 'Forgive me O my Lord!' we would say: 'Forgive' is a verb which is indicative of supplication. We would not call it 'imperative', for this is not showing enough respect for our Lord. No one wields the authority to command Allah.

A command is expressive of power whereas the first and foremost association of the word 'supplication' is incapacity and weakness expressed by a servant through his entreat of his Lord. *Du'a'* (supplication) is a proof that conceit that leads to self-deception has been crushed. It is the outcome of a servant's acknowledgement that he has no power over a particular matter and no one has power over it except Allah, so he turns to him in supplication.

According to the verse, 'man prays for harm, just as he prays for good', which means he is just as anxious to be answered with haste. In a fit of anger, one would pray to Allah against himself, his children, or his wealth. Fury causes one to forget the dictates of good conduct and makes him do things quite alien to his sound nature. They strip one of discretion, so he would hasten to pray for evil to befall people or things that matter most and even entreats Allah to respond to him. It is a mercy from Allah that He does not respond to such prayers that, if indicative of anything, are only indicative of the foolishness of him who utters them. A mother would pray to Allah against her own child. If Allah were to respond to perhaps just one of these prayers, that would be enough to break her own heart. It is out of Allah's Mercy that He causes such prayers, which we utter thoughtlessly and hope to be answered hastily, to be of no effect. Allah says: 'If Allah were to hasten on for people the harm [they have earned] as they wish to hasten on the good, their time would already be up' (*Yunus*: 11). If Allah were to answer their prayers for evil, it would be the cause of their ruin.

There is a point worth reflecting on here. It sure pleases us that Allah lets our foolish prayers for harm go unanswered. We know He does that out of His Absolute Wisdom. Why then do we dislike it that Allah does not respond to some of our prayers for good? Is it not for a reason He knows, too? We need to understand that just as Allah does not respond to our prayers for harm for our own good, He does not respond to some of our wishes also for our own good. Allah's Wisdom dictates that He sometimes prevents you from something you wish for since if it came true, it would turn out to be devoid of any good. Therefore, we should treat Allah's response in both cases based on the same standards. We should be pleased with whatever Allah decrees. We should resign ourselves to His Wisdom when He denies us some of our prayers for good just as we feel thankful to Him when He spares us the outcomes of our prayers for harm. Both are manifestations of His Mercy and Wisdom.

The disbelievers, at the time of Prophet Muhammad, prayed against themselves, as Allah tells us in the Quran: 'Allah, if this really is the truth from You, then rain stones on us from the heavens' (*al-Anfal*: 32). They also said: 'Make the sky fall on us in pieces, as you claimed will happen' (*al-Isra'*: 92).

Had Allah responded to these supplications, He would have completely exterminated the disbelievers. However, He has willed, out of His Wisdom, not to respond to their prayers, so they exist until the present day and will remain until the coming of the Final Hour. It would have been more plausible had they said, 'O Allah if this really is the truth, then guide our hearts to accept it.' They did not care about faith, nor were they keen on attaining it. They were consumed by hatred of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his message to the extent of wishing to die- if that message was the truth- instead of believing with him!

Humankind are naturally inclined to haste, as Allah says: 'Man was created hasty: I will show you My signs soon, so do not ask Me to hasten them' (*al-Anbiya'*: 37). One would pray heartily for something he believes is good for him. However, much trouble and misery may be lurking behind it. On the other hand, your Lord may send upon you something that, at first glance, would seem a misfortune, yet then appears to be a blessing in disguise. In essence, nobody truly knows where good lies, so resign your affair to your Lord *Glorified is He*. Whenever you pray to Him, let your primary intention to show humility before your Exalted Lord, and whether or not your prayer are answered, be grateful to Him for His favour.

Allah says in the following verse:

وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ آيَاتَيْنِ ۖ فَحَوِّنَا ۚ آيَةَ اللَّيْلِ وَجَعَلْنَا آيَةَ النَّهَارِ مُبْصِرَةً لِّبَنَاتُوا
فَضْلًا مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَلِتَعْلَمُوا عَدَدَ السِّنِينَ وَالْحِسَابَ ۚ وَكُلَّ شَيْءٍ فَضَّلْنَاهُ تَفْصِيلًا ﴿١٢﴾

**We made the night and the day as two signs, then darkened the night and made the daylight for seeing, for you to seek your Lord's bounty and to know how to count the years and calculate. We have explained everything in detail [12]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 12)**

Allah has made time in the form of day and night and has given each a distinct role, so they are complementary, not conflicting. Night is not opposed to day or vice versa. Rather, each is created for a purpose that completes the role of the other.

In several verses of the Quran, Allah likens the creation of the night and day to that of the male and female human beings. Men and women are, likewise, complementary and are not created different to be adversaries. Conflict arises among fanatic members of both sexes who look on difference as a source of conflict. This is the outcome of misunderstanding the nature of the relationship between men and women. Like the night and day, men and women have different roles to perform in life, so they cannot be identical in everything. They are different, not conflicting. Let us ponder these verses: 'By the enshrouding night, by the radiant day, by His creation of male and female' (*al-Layl*: 1-4). Allah mentions the day and night then the male and female to direct our attention to the fact that each pair is complementary. Just as the day and night are equally essential due to their difference, men and women are created different to collaborate, not act as rivals of one another.

Back to the verse we are reflecting on; Allah says: 'We made the night and the day as two signs...' (*al-Isra'*: 12). Do we need a definition of the 'night' or 'day'? We witness these two miraculous signs of Allah's creation every day, which makes presenting a scientific definition of these recurrent phenomena here quite needless, if not absurd.

Allah has created the night and day for us and has assigned a special task to each. He once mentions the day first, as in His words: 'Consider the bright morning hours, and the night when it grows still and dark' (*ad-Duha*: 1-2). In another chapter, He begins with the night: 'Consider the night as it veils [the earth] in darkness, and the day as it rises bright' (*al-Layl*: 1-2). In the following verse, He mentions neither of the two, but speaks instead about the two predominant characteristics of both: '... and brought into being deep darkness as well as light...' (*al-An'am*: 1). Importance of the night consists in its darkness and that of the day in its light. Darkness means tranquillity, stillness, and relaxation, for during the night, the nerves are soothed by the absence of light, and the body renews its energy. This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Extinguish lamps when you go to bed.'⁽¹⁾

(1) *Al-Bukhari Narrated in his Sahih (3280), on the authority of Jabir ibn Abdullah, that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said "When it is evening, stop your children from going out, for the devils spread out during that time. When an hour of the night has passed, release them. Fasten your doors while mentioning Allah's Name."*

Many people see the dazzling lights that characterize modern nights a manifestation of a mature civilization, even though Allah has made darkness of the night a blessing for His servants to rest. Light is for movement and action. Whoever rests at night rises the next morning reinvigorated, ready to resume his work. Every undertaking one performs requires energy. Therefore, the body requires an adequate amount of rest to be able to resume their task the following day. Therefore, Allah says: 'In His mercy He has given you night and day...' (*al-Qasas*: 73), but why? '... So that you may rest...' (*al-Qasas*: 73) during the night, and 'seek His bounty' (*al-Qasas*: 73) during the day.

We all know that some jobs need to be done at night, like works related to security and surveillance, which means the night is not always for rest and sleep, so we find that Allah also says: 'Among His signs are your sleep, by night and by day...' (*ar-Rum*: 23). Allah, who knows us best, knows that some of us may need to stay up during the night, for certain jobs require this, and sleep during the day. However, this does not make it a rule, but it is only an exception of the rule that the night is for rest and the day is for activity. Whoever deliberately contradicts this rule without having the need to do will get his own body to rebel against him. Out of His Mercy, Allah has created in the human body several mechanisms for our protection. When one exposes himself to the strain of overwork his body organs react to save him. For example, if one runs too fast, his respiratory system alerts him to the lack of air, so he becomes short of breath. His muscles alert him through pain to the lack of blood in them. Signs of fatigue generally send one the message that his body is unable to bear that level of physical exertion. This is what happens when one is going up the stairs, for example. Force of the gravity counters the weight of the body, which requires more energy to be expended while climbing the stairs. This means that more blood needs to be pumped throughout the body and a higher breathing rate is needed.

Allah has made fatigue and the subsequent inclination towards rest a natural checking mechanism that works within the human being when he exceeds the limit in physical effort.

= *Extinguish your lamps while mentioning Allah's Name. Cover your water vessels while mentioning Allah's Name, and cover your food containers while mentioning Allah's Name. If anything occurs (while you are asleep), this will be protection to you.'*

Another mechanism is sleep. When one overburdens his body with too much effort, ignoring its need for rest, the irresistible sleep mechanism Allah has created in us does its job. One does not choose to fall asleep, but is forced to do when his body needs it. It is almost as though his natural disposition were saying to him, 'Rest, or else you will not be fit to resume work.' Thus, Allah does not leave the human being to his own desires, but protects him from his exaggeration by endowing his body with such powers. This explains why one's body would rebel against him after, for example, two days without sleep. On the third day, your exhausted body must inevitably tyrannize over you and force you to sleep almost double your usual hours to make up for that exertion.

Back to the verse we are dealing with, Allah says: 'We made the night and the day as two *ayat* (signs)...' (*al-Isra'*: 12). We have previously pointed out that *aya* (the singular form of *ayat*) means something remarkable that spells the Might and Majesty of the Creator and which He, therefore, commands us to reflect on. To elaborate, the word *aya* (sign) is used to refer to three things.

First, it means a wonder of the creation. The various blessings Allah has created in the universe and made in the service of human beings, both the believers and the disbelievers, like those mentioned in the following verses, for example: 'And from among His *ayat* (signs) are the night and the day, and the sun and the moon...' (*Fussilat*: 37). Allah also says: 'And among His *ayat* (signs) are the ships that sail like [floating] mountains through the seas' (*ash-Shura*: 32). Such *ayat* (signs) call our attention to the Might of the Creator *the Exalted*.

Second, the word *ayat* is also used to refer to the miracles Allah has given to the Messengers to serve as proofs of their truthfulness. Their purpose was to convince people that those Messengers were truly sent by Allah to deliver His Message. The *aya* (miracle) that was given to each of Allah's Messengers was necessarily in the area where his people excelled. That was to defy them, for even though the miracle was always in the field of excellence of the people it was sent to, they were never capable of matching, let alone surpassing, it. Allah says: '... Nothing prevents Us from sending *ayat* (miraculous signs) except the fact that previous peoples denied them...' (*al-Isra'*: 59).

Third, the word *ayat* is also used to refer to the verses of the Glorious Quran. They are the words of Allah that convey His ordinance and guide humankind to the best way of life.

As it appears through examining all the three meanings of the word, *ayat* denotes something magnificent and therefore worthy of reflecting on. The unending signs of the wondrous universe, the miracle that were given to Allah's Messengers, and the verses of the Quran are all characterized by unique grandeur and precision. Thus, when Allah says: 'We made the night and the day as two *ayat*...' (*al-Isra'*: 12), He means two 'signs of the universe' which meanwhile offer tangible interpretations of the *ayat* (verses) of the Quran.

In the verse, Allah says: '... then [We] *mahawna* the night...' (*al-Isra'*: 12). The Arabic verb *mahawna* denotes (efface) or (remove). Here it refers to the fact that Allah removes light by making the sun set for darkness to take its place. The word may also be intended to refer to the nature of the night, not the wiping out of daylight. This is like saying, 'Glory is to Him who has made milk white,' so this does not mean that milk had another colour which Allah has turned white! Likewise, *mahawna* may also be intended to mean 'We have created the night dark, without allusion to the nature of the day.

Allah then says: '... and [We] made the daylight *mubsira*...' (*al-Isra'*: 12). The word *mubsira* literally denotes (capable of seeing). Is the daylight really capable of seeing? Does it possess eyesight? The meaning intended here is that the light enables us to see, for it makes things visible to us. In this sense, the word *mubsera* is used to describe the miracles Allah has given to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: '... But when our *mubsira* signs came to them...' (*an-Naml*: 13). Here the word *mubsera* is used to describe the signs. Still, it does not mean the signs themselves have the ability to see, but it enables others to see [the truth] by providing evidence for it.

Another deeper meaning may be also inferred from the usage of this word. At one time, scientists believed that we are able to see things since rays from our eyes fall on them. This was held as a fact until the Muslim scientist Ibn Al-Haytham proved it wrong. He pointed out that if things became visible due to rays falling on them from our eyes, we would be able to see objects in the dark so long as we are in the light. It follows then that rays do not emanate

from the eyes. Rather, they are reflected off the object at which the eyes look. This explains why we are able to see things only when they are in the light.

They are objects that allow the eyes to see. Accordingly, describing daylight as *mubsira* (literally: "able to see") may be an allusion to the aforementioned scientific fact, and this represents the height of the unsurpassed verbal precision of the Quran. True are the words of Allah: 'We shall show them Our signs in every region of the earth and in themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth...' (*Fussilat*: 53).

So Allah has created day and night: '... for you to seek your Lord's bounty...' (*al-Isra'*: 12). This is the first reason mentioned in the verse, and we understand that it refers to the day. As we have stated earlier, the day is for work and seeking livelihood. Allah says in another verse: 'In His mercy He has given you night and day, so that you may rest and seek His bounty...' (*al-Qasas*: 73). Logically, '... so that you may rest...' is mention in reference to the night, and '... seek His bounty...' refers to the day.

Work means a process of interaction between a person and the material world around him, like a farmer working with his land and resources or a craftsman with his tools. The day is the best time for this purposeful interaction, for darkness enshrouds objects and obscures them. This also makes the night the best time for sleep and relaxation. Both the day and night are creatures of Allah that have a purpose and a role to fulfil. Allah has '... made darkness and light...' (*al-An'am*: 1). The world and all that is in it shows clearly in the light of the day, which enables us to disperse through the land for activity and struggle. For one to afford this exertion, he must take his share of rest, hence the wisdom behind creating the night.

Another reason why Allah has created time in the form of the day and night is for us '... to know how to count the years and calculate...' (*al-Isra'*: 12). Passage of the day and night are the means by which we measure time. For anything to be counted, it has to be made up of units. Were it not for the recurrence of the day and night, all time would be a single unit unable to be divided into days, months, and years.

Counting days and years is absolutely necessary in order for us to carry out our worldly activities. In farming, for example, rainy or windy seasons are

determined by the calculation of time. Determination of time is also indispensable for performing acts of worship. The time of *Hajj* (Islamic Pilgrimage), *Ramadan* (the month of mandatory fasting), the times of the Five Daily Prayers, the *Jumu'a* (Friday Congregational Prayer), etc. have specific times when they have to be observed. Knowledge of these times would be impossible were it not for the passage of day and night.

Allah *the Exalted* has created a magnificent, unerring system where the moon appears at night and the sun appears during the day. Each has a determined role in the calculation of days, months, and years. Rising of the sun marks the beginning of a new day and its setting heralds the end. As for the moon, its stages of development determine months (lunar months). When it is a crescent, it marks the beginning of the month. Afterwards, it grows larger until it is a full moon then starts to decline again until it reaches its waning stage at the end of the month. Thus, the sun serves a necessary purpose in determining days, and the moon in determining months. The night the crescent appears is the first night of the new lunar month. This is why we start practicing the rituals of *Ramadan* the very night when the crescent appears; we do not wait the following day to come. True are the words of Allah who says: 'It is He Who made the sun a shining radiance and the moon a light, determining phases for it so that you might know the number of years and how to calculate time...' (*Yunus*: 5). Thus, the different phases of the moon constitute the means by which we determine the beginning of each lunar month. This is the most precise system for calculating time on which astronomers, oceanographers and others still rely until today.

One cannot know the time if the hands of his clock go too fast or too slow. As well life would be a state of exemplary chaos if we were not able to calculate time. Allah has created the sun and the moon and makes them run according to a precise system that is never altered. None of the two can ever deviate from its orbit. Allah says about His magnificent creation: 'The sun and the moon follow their calculated courses' (*ar-Rahman*: 5). This is an inalterable system Allah has made for us to rely on to determine time. Allah concludes the verse by saying: '... We have explained everything in detail' (*al-Isra'*: 12). The Arabic word *tafsila* here translated as (in detail) is derived

from the stem *fasl* that denotes separating two things so they are seen distinctly from one another. Thus, *fasl* is done for the sake of clarity. In the Quran, Allah explains everything related to faith and life in such a precise and clear way that it is almost as if every news told in it were separated from the other so it stands firm and clear, devoid of any ambiguity.

Examples of this unique clarity and precision are numerous in the Quran, so I choose that about ritual cleansing (in preparation for the prayers), even though it is quite irrelevant to the subject matter of the verse we are reflecting on. Allah Almighty says: 'You who believe, when you are about to pray, washing your faces and your hands up to the elbows...' (*al-Ma'ida*: 6). The word 'face' is used without any modification, for no one disagrees about the meaning of this word and the part of the body it is used to refer to. As for the 'hand' it may refer to the part until the wrist, the elbow, or the shoulder. This is why Allah specifies the part of the hand that should be washed in ritual ablution (*wudu'*): '... your hands up to the elbows...' (*al-Ma'ida*: 6). Allah then says in the same verse: '... wipe your heads, wash your feet up to the ankles...' (*al-Ma'ida*: 6). The appropriate action for the head is 'wiping' as opposed to washing. The word *rijl* here translated as (feet) may be used to refer to any part of the leg. This is why Allah specifies the very part of it concerned with ritual ablution, so He says: '...Feet up to the ankles...' (*al-Ma'ida*: 6). In the total absence of water, or if it is difficult or unaffordable to obtain, Allah permits us to resort to dry ritual cleansing (*tayyamum*), as He says: '... and if you cannot find any water, then find some clean *sa'id* (dust, earth, soil or sand) and wipe your faces and hands with it...' (*an-Nisa'*: 43) This dry ritual cleansing is valid in case of inability to observe ritual cleansing with water. This poses a question: Can wiping the face and hands with dust be in any way a form of 'cleaning'? No, in fact even ritual cleansing with water (*wudu'*) is not really meant for maintaining hygiene, for even if the body is already clean, one must observe this ritual before *salat* (the prayer). Otherwise, it would be fine to observe ritual cleansing with perfumes, as some might suggest! The reason why we are observing ritual cleansing is actually to brace ourselves to enter into the state of solemnity associated with *salat*. We do this only in obedience to the One Who commands it to show submission to Him as we are about to stand

before Him in the Prayer. This understanding is what made 'Ali Zayn Al-Abedin *Allah be pleased with him* turn pale whenever he was observing ritual cleansing. When asked about that, he said, 'Do you know Who I am preparing to stand before right now?!' He turned pale with awe of Allah before Whom he was about to stand in the Prayer. *Salat* cannot be treated as a habit or an ordinary occurrence. It is the solemn event of standing before our Lord and Creator, so a believer must prepare for it in the manner Allah has enjoined on him.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَكُلَّ إِنْسَانٍ أَلْزَمْنَاهُ طَلْعَهُ فِي عُنُقِهِ ۖ وَنُخْرِجُ لَهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ كِتَابًا يَلْقَاهُ مَنشُورًا ﴿١٣﴾

**We have bound each human being's destiny to his neck.
On the Day of Resurrection, We shall bring out a record for
each of them, which they will find spread wide open [13]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 13)**

The word *Ta'irah* (one's destiny depending on their conduct) means one's conduct and deeds. It originally goes back to the superstitious tradition of prediction the Arab, via flying birds. That is to say, when one of them wished to take some action, he would collect a bird and release it. If that bird passed from left to right they called it '*Sanih*'⁽¹⁾. This would be a cause of optimism among them.

If, on the other hand, it flew from the right to the left, they would call it *Barih*, being a sign of pessimism among them. Thus, they accuse the bird of causing the negative outcome and attribute the action to it, despite the fact that the bird was absolutely innocent and blameless.

Then, they took the right direction as a good omen and the left as a bad one. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* loved optimism⁽²⁾ and

(1) *Sanih*: something which comes to you on your right hand side; such as a gazelle, bird or anything else. *Barih*: something which comes to you on your left hand side. [Lissan Al-'Arab, component: س ن ح]

(2) *On the authority of Anas Allah be pleased with him, the Messenger Muhammad peace and blessing be upon him said, 'I am pleased by a positive outlook. The positive outlook is expressed by a good word.'* Narrated by Ahmad in his *Musnad* (3/118, 153) and Abu Ash-Sheikh Al-Asbhani in a work entitled *Akhlaq An-Nabi* (Hadith # 794)

disliked pessimism. This is because optimism invigorates the body systems and prepares them for movement. But, pessimism leads to stagnation, retreat and destroys movement and interaction in the world.

At this point, the True Lord *Glorified is He* states: Do not attribute to a bird or accuse it of what it has nothing to do with. Rather; your 'omen' is your actions, to which you are inextricably bound; they remain with you and do not depart from you. No one else will be accountable for your actions just as you will not for theirs. Allah *Glorified is He* has said in another verse: '...and no bearer of burdens shall be made to bear another's burden...' (*al-Isra'*: 15). Therefore, do not cast the responsibility for your actions onto a blameless animal.

For the other part of this verse, saying: '...and on the Day of Resurrection We shall bring forth for him a record which he will find wide open' (*al-Isra'*: 13).

That is the book in which man's actions are recorded by the angels recording our actions, and about which Allah has said: 'And the record [of everyone's deeds] will be laid open; and you will behold the guilty filled with dread at what [they see] therein; and they will exclaim: "Oh, woe unto us! What a record is this! It leaves out nothing, be it small or great, but takes everything into account!" For they will find all that they ever wrought [now] facing them, and [will know that] your Lord does not wrong anyone.' (*al-Kahf*: 49) This book will be received outspread on the Day of Judgment. That is to say: opened and prepared to be read. The True Lord *Glorified is He* then goes on to say:

أَقْرَأْ كِتَابَكَ كَفَىٰ بِنَفْسِكَ الْيَوْمَ عَلَيْكَ حَسِيبًا ﴿١٤﴾

Read your record. Today your own soul is enough to calculate your account [14] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 14)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* depicts a scene from the Day of Judgment; when each human being will stand before his Lord *Glorified is He* and will be called to read their own book in order to bear witness to themselves⁽¹⁾. They

(1) Some of the virtuous have mentioned that this book is inscribed by your tongue (as if it were a pen), your saliva serves as its ink, and your organs are its pages. You stand and dictate it to the Angels recording your deeds. It contains no additions or deletions. If any of its contents are rejected by you, the witness will be part of yourself (the body part used to commit the sin) against yourself. (Tafsir Al-Qurtubi 5/3958)

will confess to all that they have committed. Confession is the best evidence. This is a situation where there is no chance for intransigence, argumentation, or rejection. If someone challenges these records, Allah will make their organs bear the witness against their lies by giving their organs the ability to tell the truth.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'on the Day when their own tongues and hands and feet will bear witness against them by [recalling] all that they did!' (*an-Nur*: 24] He also says: 'And they will ask their skins, "Why did you bear witness against us?"'- [and] these will reply: "Allah, who gives speech to all things, has given speech to us [as well]...' (*Fussilat*: 21).

Indeed, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has given the human beings control over some of their body organs in the life of this world, making these organs submissive to their command; they do not disobey him whether they are commanded to do good or iniquity. For example, hands can be used to commit acts of violence and aggression, but also can give charity and support to relief the burden of the indigent. Legs can be used to go to either a mosque or a bar or other places of immoral practices. In all of these cases, body organs are obedient and submissive to us; they do not disobey us, even if they do not like some of our actions. The fact that they carry out your orders is not evidence that they are pleased with you. This compliance may be lacking contentment in part of it.

For example, a brigade commander's order is quickly effectuated by his troops even if there is something wrong with it. Nonetheless, when they come under review of the supreme commander, these troops disclose everything about the decisions of the inferior commander. This is also the case in the life of this world; Allah has given man control over his limbs, which are never slow in executing his command. However, when executing that command, limb may be resentful or even malevolently cursing the doer. But, on the Day of Judgment, limbs will be released from man's control and then will testify to his deeds. '...Sufficient is your own self today to make out your account!' (*al-Isra*': 14) That is to say: It is definitely fair enough, from our part to provide you with a witness from yourself.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

مَنْ أَهْتَدَىٰ فَإِنَّمَا يَهْتَدِي لِنَفْسِهِ ۖ وَمَنْ ضَلَّٰ فَإِنَّمَا يَضِلُّ عَلَيْهَا ۚ وَلَا
 نُزِرْ وَازِرَةً ۖ وَزَرَّ أُخْرَىٰ ۚ وَمَا كُنَّا مُعَذِّبِينَ حَتَّىٰ نَبْعَثَ رَسُولًا ﴿١٥﴾

**Whoever accepts guidance does so for his own good;
 whoever strays does so at his own peril. No soul will bear
 another's burden, nor do We punish until We have sent a
 messenger [15] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 15)**

His saying: 'Whoever chooses to follow the right path, follows it but for his own good' (*al-Isra'*: 15). This should be accounted to the fact that no benefit devolves upon the True Lord *Glorified is He* as a result of obedience, as much as disobedience does not pose Him any harm. Hence, He has no need for His creatures. With His attributes of perfection, Allah has granted man, whom He made his vicegerent in the earth, guidance. As well, He has prepared these worldly life components, such as the earth, the sky, the sun, the moon, the air, mountain ranges, water, etc. even before creating man.

Thus, the attributes of perfection are established for Him *Glorified is He* before He brought all creatures into existence. That is their obedience does not increase Him in anything and their disobedience does not harm Him at all.

At this point, perhaps someone might ask, 'How do you explain the duties human beings have been assigned?' We respond by stating: Indeed, the duties which are issued by Allah to His creatures are for their favour and benefit, for their life to continue in harmony not in contradiction. For this reason, the Creator *Glorified is He* has made a system for us to follow. The implementation of this system is mandatory because it is from Allah, The Creator, who intimately knows both His creatures and the things that keep their life correct and in sound order. If it were a man-made system, you could have the option to reject it. As for the Way of Allah, departing from it cannot be countenanced by any means.

A common saying among the countrymen is, 'a finger cut observing the rules of Allah, causes you no pain.' That is to say if the religious law has established a rule, it must be followed without objection. On the other hand, if

it were a human legislation, the world would rise to halt it from being carried out and not sit idly by.

A sign of Allah's perfection and His self-sufficiency is that He patiently forbears all prejudice, false accusations, and omission committed by His creatures against Him and against one another. That is because He *Glorified is He* manages things wisely and precisely according to how significant each matter happens to be. No matter is decided on earth until it is first decided upon in the heavens. If you asked someone to do you a favour, but they did not care about, refused to do it, or they might have made an earnest effort but in vain and then you become angry and enraged. In such a situation, the Creator *Glorified is He* tolerates His creatures' omission and relieves them from difficulty. Furthermore, he teaches them that their needs are fulfilled according to His determination and allotment; so, they should not blame each other if things are not going as desired. Each thing has a certain point of occurrence. No need to be hasty. It would be better to seek relief from Allah first.

Thus, Islam teaches us that, before we promise doing something for someone, we should first say, 'If Allah wills'; that is to protect ourselves from getting into trouble and being accused of lying, in case we are incapable of fulfilling promise. This way, we make our capability of implementation conditional on Allah's Will, if we managed the issue, thank Allah, if not, we are not to blame.

Accordingly, the legislation of Allah aims to protect people from one another. It serves eradicating causes of animosity between people when they fail in satisfying their needs. It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* is proclaiming to you: Relax, things have their pre-planned times, so do not oppress people. When your need is satisfied, you should note that it is Allah who fulfilled it for you, and the person you seek support from is a mere means to achieve the task in this worldly life.

The matter becomes even clearer within the realm of medicine and treatment of disease. A physician is the means that Allah decided to bless mankind with in order to attain cures. When Allah grants success to a physician, their intervention coincides with Allah's will that a cure be found or developed.

Doctors who are convinced with this reality confirm it in their saying, 'We are merely from among the lucky ones.' That is they are lucky by treating the most likely cases to be cured. The poet has spoken truthfully in his words:

Doctors, indeed the people do berate

But the doctors' mistakes are just the strokes of fate

The part of the noble verse, saying: 'Whoever chooses to follow the right path follows it but for his own good...' (*al-Isra'*: 15) means that they are making favour for themselves, not for Him *Glorified is He*.

Following the right path (*al-ihida'*) is to be consistently devoted to the way of Allah. The benefit of your devotion devolves upon you, as much as the benefit of the devotion of others (to the way of Allah) also devolves upon you. In all cases, you are benefitting from this way. For this reason, whenever you see someone following Allah's way, you should praise Allah and be pleased with their uprightness. By no means should you behave sarcastically toward or make fun of him because his uprightness is a source of welfare that returns to you, leading a good life.

On the other hand, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '...and whoever goes astray goes but astray to his own hurt...' (*al-Isra'*: 15). That is to say: the end result of his deviance from the way of Allah returns to him. That is because a person's evil, as expressed in his failure to abide by the way of Allah, negatively affects you and everyone else in his direct vicinity. Both the deviant and their community suffer the calamity of their evil. Strangely enough we see some imbeciles looking upon a deviant or someone with bad manners with disgust and hatred. Rather, they make things even worse when cursing them. This deviant person is in need of someone to pray to Allah for their guidance. First and foremost so that community may be relieved of his evil, and, secondly, to enjoy the felicity of his guidance. On the contrary, cursing them will encourage them to increase in evil and consequently increasing community suffering.

From this starting point, Islam teaches us that whoever possesses useful knowledge should pass it onto others. For whenever useful knowledge is circulated among people, they all would benefit from it. Islamic teachings

prohibit concealment of knowledge because concealment harms not only the individual but also the community at large.

The Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* has said: 'Whoever conceals knowledge will be bridled by Allah with reins of fire on the Day of Judgment.'⁽¹⁾

Another aspect of perfection, that the Divine System encourages us to embody, is that every professional should master their profession and every artisan should perfect their work. Indeed, a human being can often master one pursuit in his lifetime but his demands are numerous and varied. For instance, a tailor may not master but only his or her specific work, while they are, no doubt, in need of many other services and specialties: the physician, the educator, the engineer, the blacksmith, the carpenter, the farmer etc. When they do their work precisely, Allah will provide them with those who will satisfy their needs perfectly; no matter if the latter is wishing so or not.

Therefore, being excellent yourself ensures the others being excellent. If you perform your work with excellence; essentially, you are benefiting even if the people around you are mean and good-for-nothing. In time, Allah will ease the way toward securing your needs from them; perhaps in ways they neither want nor are able to sense.

The statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: '...and no bearer of burdens shall be made to bear another's burden...' (*al-Isra*': 15) means: None will be required to carry the sin of others, nor will anyone be taken to account for the felonious deeds of others. And so the phrase: '...bearer of burdens...' (*al-Isra*': 15) is derived from the Arabic word (*Wizr*) which is a heavy load. In fact, the word (*Wazir*) or minister is a derivative of this word because holder of this position carries weighty burdens on behalf of the president, king, or emir he represents.

The justice of Allah necessitates that a human being be accountable for their own actions and everyone be questioned about their own account. As a

(1) Narrated by Ibn Hibban (*Mawarid Az-zam'an*—96), Hakim in his *Mustadrak* (1/102), he said: The chain of narrators is sound, it is a tradition that was related by the Egyptians, it meets the criteria of the Two Imams and contains no hidden defect. Imam Dhahabi concurred with his findings.

result, none can foist his action upon another, as Allah *Glorified is He* states in his noble book: '...no parent will be of any avail to his child, nor a child will in the least avail his parent...' (*Luqman*: 33).

This has been a contentious issue, attracting a great deal of attention among the orientalist; those who probe the Quran for defects. They pause at this verse: '...and no bearer of burdens shall be made to bear another's burden...' (*al-Isra'*: 15). They asked, how they could reconcile this verse with the other verse, saying: 'Yet most certainly will they have to bear their own burdens, and other burdens besides their own...' (*al-'Ankabut*: 13). And the third, saying: 'Hence, on Resurrection Day they shall bear the full weight of their own burdens, as well as some of the burdens of those ignorant ones whom they have led astray: oh, how evil the load with which they shall be burdened!' (*an-Nahl*: 25)

We respond by saying: The reconciliation between the first verse and the two other verses is simple if they understand the difference between *wizr* (sin) in the first verse, and *wizr* (sin) in the last two verses. In the former, *wizr* is a personal burden clinging to single individual and not affecting others. In which case, because the individual chose misguidance, they must shoulder the burden of their own misguidance. However, in the latter, the individual is a source of misguidance. That is they lead others to corruption and deviance. Therefore, that specific individual must bear responsibility for his own sin and for sins of those whom they misguided.

This issue is further clarified for us, by a Noble Prophetic Hadith which reads: 'Whoever initiates a good practice in Islam will have his reward and a reward for all those who take up the practice after him; without reducing their rewards in the least. Conversely, whoever initiates an evil practice in Islam will carry his burden and the burden of all those who follow his example after him; without reducing their burden in the least.'⁽¹⁾

As for the part of the verse saying: '...Moreover, We would never chastise [any community for the wrong they may do] before We have sent an apostle [to them]' (*al-Isra'*: 15).

(1) Narrated by Muslim in his *Sahih* (1017) from the tradition of Jarir ibn 'Abdullah Al-Bajli.

Al-'Adhab (Chastisement, torture) refers to punishment for non-observance. However, before you punish me for committing it, you must instruct me that such is a non-observance, a crime; an affair which disrupts the harmony of the community. There is no crime in the absence of a definitive legal pronouncement which outlines the criminal behaviour and stipulates its punishment. Then afterward, such criminal law enactment must be circulated in the official press, so that people can learn of it. By this means, evidence is established against perpetrator and they are exposed to punishment. For this reason, even within positive law, we say: There is no punishment without a criminal charge; no criminal charge without a definitive legal pronouncement and even with the pronouncement secured it must be publicized.

As these precepts become clear within peoples' minds, the term punishment is given concrete meaning. Again, evidence is established against those who fail to comply with the law. On the contrary, punishing a perpetrator who is ignorant of their crime punishment, gives them the right to challenge the same on the basis of the logic presented within this verse.

But if behaviour is first criminalized and then released in the official press, there can be no recourse to excuse by ignorance afterward. Indeed, ignorance after publicity does not absolve from punishment. It is as though Allah's statement: '...Moreover, We would never chastise [any community for the wrong they may do] before We have sent an apostle [to them]' (*al-Isra'*: 15) joins all of the previous precepts: crime, punishment, definitive legal pronouncement and notification. In view of that, Allah has sent His Messenger Muhammad (*peace and blessing be upon him*) to teach the people the way of the True Lord *Glorified is He* to clarify for them what the divine law has proscribed as well as the punishments attendant to those crimes. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: '... for there never was any community but a warner has [lived and] passed away in its midst.' (*Fatir*: 24)

He also states: 'O followers of the Bible! Now, after a long time during which no apostles have appeared, there has come unto you [this] Our Apostles to make [the truth] clear to you, lest you say, "No bearer of glad tidings has come unto us, nor any warner..."' (*al-Ma'ida*: 19). That is, the message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* leaves you no pretext of ignorance.

In this regard, some scholars raised the issue that, 'If this evidence is established against those who believes in the message of the Prophet *peace and blessing be upon him* what then is to be said of the disbeliever, who neither believes nor knows anything about the Way of Allah?' It is as though they are seeking a pardon for their disbelief. We respond by stating: First, man knows His Lord *Glorified is He* through the use of his intellectual faculties. Here, we are referring to that faithful criterion which the Creator *Glorified is He* has endowed to man and it is called in Arabic, *Fitra* or instinct. This *Fitra* is responsible for guiding to a belief in an irresistible force behind existence; even if it had not been for a messenger. Examples are so many. Imagine that you have become distanced from all exit paths in a vast expansive desert. You do not find any remnants of life within it and you are overtaken by sleep, so you sleep. When you arise from your slumber you are surprised to find that a table containing the choicest food and drink has been erected for you. By Allah, would you not contemplate the affair before extending your hand to the table? Would your attention not be turned; your curiosity sparked, as to who brought it to you? In this manner, the human being with his mind and his instinct must be guided to the conclusion that existence has an intelligent creator. It is not possible that this wondrous most perfected of systems is simply the outcome of coincidence. Did Adam know his Lord with anything besides these tools which Allah has created within us? Undeniably, we came into being and found a world amenable to adaptation and possibility. We found before our eyes many signs which indicate the presence of the Creator *Glorified is He*. Each is a thread, that if followed would deliver you. Take for instance, the sun which, despite its distance, illuminates the universe, rising in the morning and setting in the evening without delay for a day or even a moment from its destination. Would that creational sign not attract your attention?

Previously, we cited the example of Edison, the inventor of the electric lamp. In view of all the tools, components, and capital required to create electric lighting, he must have offered the project great consideration and study, taking into account the potential failures and risks. What, then, do you think about the 'divine lighting lamp', which does not require effort, money, maintenance, or replacement?

Take also the example of the primitive Arab person who knows nothing but the desert; when he saw the droppings of a camel and its footprints, he would use those impressions to figure out who had made them. In the primordial simplicity of the Bedouin, he says, 'Camel droppings indicate the existence of a camel and the footprints are an indication of travelling. Then, the sky with its constellations, the earth with roads made between mountains, the stars that are glowing, and the seas that are filled with water and various types of creatures; do not all of these indicate the presence of the Subtle and the All-Aware Creator?

So, with the natural disposition which Allah has placed inside the human being, man is prepared to be guided aright and arrive at the conclusion that the universe must have a creator. Even if it is not known who He is exactly, it is known that a hidden power is there.

When a messenger is sent, by Allah, to help approaching such power, instructing man about the True Lord, the Creator, and that the unseen power, that has confounded you, is Allah, the Creator who created you and the whole world including everything whatsoever.

He *Glorified is He* is One and without partner. He, Himself, has testified that there is nothing worthy of worship besides Him.⁽¹⁾ No one proclaims otherwise, nor does anyone claim that there is a deity with Allah. With that, this claim to deity is solely reserved for Him *Glorified is He* because every claimant is awarded that which he claims if there is no one present to oppose their assertion.

It is this natural inclination to faith in the human being which is meant by Allah's saying: 'And whenever your Lord brings forth their offspring from the loins of the children of Adam, He [thus] calls upon them to bear witness about themselves: "Am I not your Lord?" –to which they answer: "Yea, indeed, we do bear witness thereto!..."' (*al-A'raf*: 172)

(1) Allah *Glorified is He* 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).

This is the Divine Covenant which Allah enacted for His creation while they were in the particle phase, in the sense that they were all contained within Adam *peace be upon him*. All the various lineages return to Adam. All human beings that were created from the very start of human life and that will be created till the end of this world, each has, in its being, a particle from Adam. This particle belonging to or forming the beginning of each individual had attested or witnessed that covenant, affirming that there is no deity except Allah. Indeed, this testimony has been completely absorbed by the innate disposition of every human being. Therefore, we call it 'the believing incline'.

Accordingly, we say to the disbeliever, who neglects their innate disposition, which invites them to faith and to the realization of Allah: How do you feel hunger and seek food? How do you feel thirst and seek water? Have you seen hunger, or touched it, or even smelled it? It is known through your instincts which Allah has placed within you. Why do you use your instincts in one respect and then neglect to use them in another?

It is really amazing how a thinking human being can turn away from His Lord and Creator while the entire created order, with every atom of it, inside of which he is situated, is celebrating the praises of their Lord. In fact, the individual molecules that make up the believer and the disbeliever alike are celebrating the praises of their Lord. Allah *Glorified is He* has said: '...and there is not a single thing but extols His limitless glory and praise: but you [O men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him! ...' (*al-Isra'*: 44). O Custodian of the created order! How do you insolently neglect Allah, while the very molecules that comprise your body are celebrating His praises? Indeed, the molecules that make up the physical constitution of the believer are in harmony with the person themselves; there is accord and consistency between them in believing in and paying praise to their Lord. Fittingly, you observe the believer at peace with himself and the material world around him as a result of a unity of faith that exists among the particles that make up his body and his will. This harmony that exists among the will of the human being, his organs, and the atoms that make up his body, appears in the phenomenon of sleep. The atoms and organs of the believer are pleased with him, love remaining with him, and do not wish to separate from him. This is because his will is in submissive obedience to Allah. As such, you observe

that the believer does not sleep much; his eyes might shutter a few brief moments throughout the night or during the day and that suffices him. This is due to his organs being in harmony with his will. In respect to these people, Allah *Glorified is He* has mentioned: 'they would lie asleep during but a small part of the night' (*adh-Dhariyat*: 17).

The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* is a human being who is normally overcome by sleep, but they were his eyes, not his heart⁽¹⁾, that were overcome by sleep, because he was in complete harmony with his will.

In this case, the human being rather resembles an unsociable and ill-mannered slave-owner possessing numerous slaves who all suffer from the maltreatment of their master; they are all longing for the opportunity to dissociate from him and flee his evil actions. This is the case of the disbeliever; their body molecules believe in their creator, but they (the disbeliever's consciousness) disbelieve. There is no consistency or harmony between their spiritual will and physical structure. Their restlessness is very visible because there is no harmony between their body molecules and their incorporeal will. Indeed, their body organs hate the very person, curse them, and wish to part away from.

If it were not for the fact that the Creator *Glorified is He* has made one's body organs subservient to them, these organs would not obey them. They eagerly anticipate the Day of Judgment when they can separate from the disbeliever's will and be released from their prison; they will speak lucidly and give evidence of all of the acts of unfaithfulness and denial committed by the disbeliever in the life of this world. For this reason, it may be noted that the disbeliever sleep excessively. It is as if the organs of their body seek relief from their evil.

You must be cognizant of the fact that praise paid by the molecules of the human body and the universe to the Creator *Glorified is He* is beyond human perception. Allah *Glorified is He* has said: '...but you [O men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him! ...' (*al-Isra'*: 44)

(1) *On the authority of Anas Allah be pleased with him who said 'The Prophet's eyes would sleep but not his heart'. Narrated by Al-Hakim in his Musatdrak (2/431). He said concerning it, 'It meets the criteria of Muslim, but he chose not to narrate it.' Muslim did narrate a Hadith on 'Aisha Allah be pleased with her (738) which reads: 'O 'Aisha my eyes slumber but not my heart.'*

So, none is able to grasp or comprehend this kind of praise, save the ones granted the ability by Allah to do so, such as Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* as explained in the verse: '... And We caused the mountains to join Dawud in extolling Our limitless glory, and likewise the birds: for We are able to do [all things].' (*al-Anbiya'*: 79)

Perhaps someone might ask here, where is the distinction, while the mountains and the birds already pay praise to Allah *Glorified is He* without Dawud *peace be upon him*? The distinction here is for Dawud. Allah allowed him to hear the praise of the mountains and the praise of the birds. He made them share with Dawud in his praise, as if it was a chorus chanting praise in a symphony for Allah. Did the True Lord not say in another verse: '...O you mountains! Sing with him the praise of Allah! And [likewise] you birds!...' (*Saba'*: 10) In other words, repeat and return the praises with him.

Allah *Glorified is He* also granted this distinction to His Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* whom He granted the ability to understand the dialect of the birds and ants, that is to say, their method of communication. Thus, he was able to hear an ant, while it conversed with its comrades.⁽¹⁾ He understood its request. This is a favour from Allah which He grants to whomever He chooses from among mankind. This is why when Sulaiman *peace be upon him* understood the language of the ants and understood its request for warning, he smiled and laughingly remarked: '...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...' (*an-Naml*: 19). Therefore, every creature from among Allah's creatures has a language and a dialect. However, none understands or comprehends them except those who Allah has enabled to acquire that knowledge and understanding.

When discoursing about this issue, we find some authors of the Prophetic biography, for instance, stating that pebbles glorified Allah in the hand of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. We say to them: your

(1) Indeed, this occurred when Sulaiman *peace be upon him* came upon the valley of the ants, he and his army, which was comprised of human beings, jinn, and birds. The ant said: '...O you ants! Get into your dwellings, lest Solomon and his hosts crush you without [even] being aware [of you]' (*an-Naml*: 18).

wording is imprecise because the pebble celebrates the praises of Allah in the hand of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* just as it celebrates the praises of Allah in the hand of Abu Jahl. Nonetheless, the mark of distinction was located in that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was able to hear the praises of the pebble in his hand. That was one of his miracles.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to turn our attention to one of the realities of creation. Namely, you have a particular life experience, similarly, you should recognize that other creatures also possess their own lives as evidenced by the statement of the True Lord: '...Everything is bound to perish, save His [eternal] Self...' (*al-Qasas*: 88). That is to say that every entity that is encompassed by the word 'thing', no matter how minute, will perish. The word *halak* (perishing) is the opposite of life; Allah *Glorified is He* has said: '... that he who would perish might perish in clear evidence of the truth, and that he who would remain alive might live in clear evidence of the truth...' (*al-Anfal*: 42); this indicates that every being has their own life style.

Returning to the True Lord's statement: '...Moreover, We would never chastise [any community for the wrong they may do] before We have sent an apostle [to them]' (*al-Isra*': 15).

If a human being is guided to the existence of Allah by their natural disposition of faith, who will assume the responsibility of teaching them the teachings and orders of Allah? Therefore, the role of a messenger, who speaks on behalf of Allah, is indispensable, reminding the heedless conscience about the existence of Allah *Glorified is He*.

The True Lord says:

وَلِإِذَا أَرَدْنَا أَنْ نُهْلِكَ قَرْيَةً أَمَرْنَا مُتْرَفِيهَا فَفَسَقُوا فِيهَا فَحَقَّ عَلَيْهَا الْقَوْلُ فَدَمَرْنَاهَا تَدْمِيرًا ﴿١٦﴾

When We decide to destroy a town, We command those corrupted by wealth [to reform], but they [persist in their] disobedience; Our sentence is passed, and We destroy them utterly [16] (The Quran, *al-Isra*': 16)

In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us an example on the consequence of deviating away from the Way of Allah. When He *Glorified is He*

sends a messenger to convey His Way to His creatures, no pretext is left for the rebellious. It is the way of the Sustaining Creator who grants blessing to all in existence. Indeed, He is worthy of obedience and submission. Is it acceptable that the human being basks in the blessings of his Lord and then disobeys Him? No, it is absolutely not. This is ingratitude to the grace flowing onto us day and night, rather, every breath you inhale. Even if this were the way of a fellow human being, there would be no excuse for the one who rebels, as supported by the adage: 'those whom I feed must take heed of my words.'

Moreover, the Benefactor *Glorified is He* did not foist responsibility upon you while you were unprepared. Quite the reverse, He charges you with responsibility for your actions at an appropriate time when your abilities and faculties are fully developed, you became an adult and ready for assuming this responsibility. For the first fifteen years of your life, He leaves you undisturbed, basking in His blessings and enjoying His favour. Then, you would rather pay homage to the Way of your Lord and rush to effect His commandments and prohibitions. For He *Glorified is He* has indeed brought you into to existence and shields you from privation.

The one who attentively observes the affair of Allah's Commandments to the believers, notices that Allah has also ordained that some of us shall issue commandments to some others, as His word indicates: 'And bid thy people to pray, and preserve therein...' (*al-Isra'*: 132). The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* has already explained this matter to us in his Hadith, 'Order your children to pray at the age of seven, and chastise them for non-performance of prayer at ten.'⁽¹⁾

This Hadith seems to represent a command from parents to children, but, in the truest sense, it is from Allah, the Commander of all. However, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted a responsibility given at such a tender age to be issued by the closest visible person to the child. The father is the visible benefactor in the child's life, in that he secures the child's food, drink, and other necessities. As such, the child is more likely to listen to and obey a

(1) Narrated by Abu Dawud in his *Sunnan* (495) and Ahmad in his *Musnad* (2/187) with the wording, "command your kids to." This is based on the Hadith of 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn Al-'As.

command that is issued by their father. A child at such a young age does not possess the depth of perception to grasp that the true benefactor is Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus, fathers were ordered to get their children accustomed to carry out the divine commandments and to punish the child if they prove negligent at certain age. It is normal and acceptable that a commandment issuer is the punisher in case of default. Then, when child reaches the actual age of discernment as set by the Highest Benefactor *Glorified is He*, they have become already accustomed to assume such a commandment and responsibility easily and conveniently.

On the other hand, if you enjoyed yourself by Allah's favours and grace while turning your back to His Way and violating the divine rules, then, wait His vengeance. Wait His unfailingly and inalterably dealing with the iniquitous in the life of this world before the Hereafter. Be aware that this vengeance is necessary in order to preserve and maintain the life safety. For indeed, when people observe that the wrongdoers, disobedient, and vainglorious are basking in the blessings of Allah; enjoying peace and security, this prompts them to desire to emulate the bad ones, taking them as role models. Consequently, corruption and mischief prevail and the community is basically destroyed.

On the other hand, when people see that the True Lord *Glorified is He* casts wrath on the offenders, they would view them as depraved scoundrels. Conversely, in this situation they would take them as a lesson and a reminder. The sagacious individual is one who takes lessons from the examples of others and benefits from their experiences.

Therefore, Wrath of Allah is intended for a wisdom that He *Glorified is He* desires to manifest. Undeniably, we have witnessed many people and countries that have been engulfed by the evil of their own actions to such an extent that they have become examples for others. In fact, the one who fails to take heed of the reminder is an example, even to someone who does not believe. This way, the movement of life is balanced; all can observe what happens to those who work corruption in the earth, how they are ruined and destroyed. If you examined the history of countries throughout the world, you can easily identify this divine principle in certain territories and simply deduct that they have been afflicted by destruction because of the obvious divergence from the Way of the True Lord.

Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* spoke truthfully when He said: 'And Allah propounds [to you] a parable: [Imagine] a town which as [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)

By no means, should you ever be given to the idea that the True Lord *Glorified is He* is negligent concerning the rebellious and those who have deviated from His Way. There surely must come a day when they are seized with aggression. If this was not the case, then their permanence would be an evil example which invites to corruption in life transactions. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'But when [this has been done, and] it is Our will to destroy a community, We convey Our last warning to those of its people who have lost themselves entirely in the pursuit of pleasures; and [if] they [continue to] act sinfully, the sentence [of doom] passed on the community takes effect, and We break it to smithereens.' (*al-Isra'*: 16)

The problem is that those who approach this Quranic text misunderstand it. They wrongfully surmise that the verb *fasaqu* (translated in the phrase: '*lost themselves entirely in the pursuit of pleasures*') is resulting from the command preceding it. This understanding would mean that Allah *Glorified is He* ordered them to act sinfully. This understanding of the noble verse is rather strange. Indeed, the commandments of the True Lord *Glorified is He* to the believers are clearly stated in the following Quran verses, among other: 'And withal, they were not enjoined aught but that they should worship Allah, sincere in their faith in Him alone...' (*al-Bayyina*: 5), 'I have been bidden to worship the Lord of this City...' (*an-Naml*: 91), '...I have been bidden to be among those who have surrendered themselves unto Him.' (*Yunus*: 72)

Therefore, the commands of Allah are reserved for obedience and good deeds. Allah does not command to perversity and deviance; this is explicitly mentioned in many verses of the Quran. Upon that basis, the objective of the verse in question becomes: We commanded its affluent members to obedience and adherence to Our Way; however, they contravened, disobeyed, and ultimately, acted sinfully. For this reason, they were justifiably punished.

A command is a request from a superior, which in this case is Allah, to an inferior which in this case is creation. He requested obedience and devotion from them but they misused the opportunity, He gave them, of having freewill, and they act sinfully contravening His commandment. Then Allah's statement: 'But when [this has been done, and] it is Our will to destroy a community...' (*al-Isra'*: 16). It is an erroneous understanding that Allah desired their destruction first and, subsequently, they deviated from His path. The right understanding of the verse is that they first deviated and then Allah desired their destruction.

The statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: '...The sentence [of doom] passed on the community takes effect...' (*al-Isra'*: 16) means that it has become mandatory that they be punished. Similarly, He says: 'Thus is your Lord's word proved true with regard to such as are bent on sinful doings...' (*Yunus*: 33). That is Allah has mandated their punishment in order to restore soundness to life affairs and to protect the believers from the mischief of those who do not believe in the Hereafter. His saying: '...We break it to smithereens' (*al-Isra'*: 16) means: We bring about its ruination, leaving but traces of it. This is not a unique event-taking place but once. Rather, if you examine history or to be more precise, the histories of stubborn disbelieving peoples, you find many communities, either cities or villages, which have been decimated by Allah. At present, nothing remains of them except a scant number of personal artefacts which prove their former presence there, the statement of Allah comes as following:

وَكَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا مِنَ الْقُرُونِ مِنْ بَعْدِ نُوحٍ وَكَفَىٰ بِرَبِّكَ بِذُنُوبِ عِبَادِهِ خَبِيرًا بَصِيرًا ﴿١٧﴾

**How many generations We have destroyed since Noah!
Your Lord knows and observes the sins of His servants
well enough [17] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 17)**

So, where are the peoples of 'Ad, Thamud, Lut (Lot) and Saleh (Shelah)? Then, the verse is a verbal case verified by several corroborating realities. Allah's statement, '...after [the time of] Nuh...' is an indication that this punishment did not take place before Nuh *peace be upon him* because people were living in a time close to the time when Adam was created by Allah and instructing them the teachings of Allah as well as the divine rules to maintain

safety and harmony in life. On the other hand, after Nuh, corruption and disbelief began to appear. As a result, an unprecedented punishment descended upon them. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Consider the daybreak. And the ten nights. Consider the multiple and The One! Consider the night as it runs its course! Considering all of this—could there be, to anyone endowed with reason, a [more] solemn evidence of the truth? Are you not aware of how your Lord has dealt with [the tribe of] 'Ad? The people of] Iram 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 let loose upon them a scourge of suffering: for, verily, your Lord is ever on the watch!' (*al-Fajr*: 1-14)

We will discuss these verses from the chapter of *al-Fajr* cursorily; indeed, the True Lord *Glorified is He* is addressing His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* with His words: 'Are you not aware of how your Lord has dealt with [the tribe of] 'Ad' (*al-Fajr*: 6). The Arabic phrase '*A lam tara*' (translated above into '*Are you not aware*') means, '*Did you not see?*'. This is because the Prophet Muhammad did not witness how Allah dealt with the people of 'Ad. So, why does the Quran's context use the verb 'see or witness' instead of 'know'? Some scholars explained that Allah's say to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* is more truthful than seeing an event by his physical eyes. Another example of this issue is in the verse: 'Are you not aware of how your Lord dealt with the Army of the Elephant?' (*al-Fil*: 1) The birthday of the Prophet Muhammad was in the year called then '*am al-fil*, the Year of the Elephant; of course, he did not see anything regarding the army of the elephant.

The verses of the chapter *al-Fajr* (the Dawn) contain evidence that the civilization of the 'Ad people, which we hardly know about, was more glorious than Pharaonic civilization which has attracted the world's attention. This is understood from the verse describing the civilization of 'Ad: 'the like of whom has never been reared in all the land?' (*al-Fajr*: 8) That is to say it is without parallel among the world's civilizations. But concerning the Pharaonic

civilization, Allah *Glorified is He* gave a brief description: 'and with Pharaoh of the [many] tent-poles?' (*al-Fajr*: 10) Then He said: 'And how many a generation have We [thus] destroyed' (*al-Isra*': 17).

The word 'how many' (*kam*) is an indication of overabundance. As well, the word 'generation' (*qurun* is the plural of '*qarn*') which, in terms of time, refers to a period of one hundred years, in Arabic. It is used to describe the people who are linked because they live in the same age and share at least one principle that is transmitted by succession. Although rare, the word *qarn* is sometimes used to refer to a period that exceeds one hundred years. For instance, we say the generation (*qarn*) of Nuh (Noah), of Hud, or the generation of Pharaoh. In these instances, we are simply referring to the time periods lived by these persons.

Allah's statement: '...For none has the like of thy Lord's awareness and insight into His creatures' sins.' (*al-Isra*': 17) means that is He *Glorified is He* needs none to inform him about the sins of His creation, among human beings and jinn. Indeed, He is most acquainted with them, for nothing, no matter how insignificant, in the heavens nor on earth escapes Him: '[for] He is aware of the [most] stealthy glance⁽¹⁾, and of all that the hearts would conceal.' (*Ghafir*: 19)

He is not in need of anyone to inform Him because He is the Aware, the All-Seeing. This is delivered in a literary style that lends it amplification. This is the point at which someone might ask: In so far as Allah *Glorified is He* knows everything, and nothing not even the most trivial thing, escapes Him, why are people questioned on the Day of Judgment concerning their deeds? We respond by stating that a question is posed for one of two purposes: The first is like when a student asks a teacher about something which the former does not know. The purpose is to gain knowledge of something not known.

(1) On the authority of Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him in reference to Allah's saying, '[for] He is aware of the [most] stealthy glance (1), and of all that the hearts would conceal.' (*Ghafir*: 19)

He said: an example of this is when a man is sitting among his community and a woman passes by, he shows them that he is averting his glance from her. However, when they are unaware he casts a furtive glance at her but when they look at him once more he again averts his glance. Allah is well aware of the state of his heart; that he would in fact, like to marvel her beauty. [cited by As-Suyuti in *Ad-Durr Al-Manthur* 7/282]

The second is like when a teacher questions a student during a test. The teacher does not ask to learn from the student; rather, they ask to confirm what the student knows. Similarly, the example befitting Allah is much loftier, the True Lord questions His creatures on the Day of Judgment concerning their deeds, to confirm they have committed such and such actions and consequently makes them witnesses against themselves. Just as He said: '[and he will be told:] "Read this your record! Sufficient is your own self today to make out your account!"' (*al-Isra'*: 14) Also, His statement: '...For none has the like of your Lord's awareness and insight...' (*al-Isra'*: 14) is like when you say about someone that they are proficient for such and such task. This implies that you are confident in and pleased with them being appointed for doing it. Then, the meaning of the verse is: Your Lord suffices you so you are not in need of anyone besides Him. Previously, we clarified that all forms of authority rest within the grasp of Allah *Glorified is He*; when He issues a judgment He holds the legislative authority, the judicial authority and the executive authority. Moreover, He is not in need of witnesses, testimony, or evidence. Thus, He is sufficient as a ruler, a judge, and a witness. For indeed, the True Lord *Glorified is He* is aware and observant of the sins of His creatures. The punishment meted out by Him is just and contains no oppression.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then goes on to state:

مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْعَاجِلَةَ عَجَّلْنَا لَهُ فِيهَا مَا نَشَاءُ لِمَنْ نُرِيدُ
ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَا لَهُ جَهَنَّمَ يَصْلَاهَا مَذْمُومًا مَدْحُورًا

If anyone desires [only] the fleeting life, We speed up whatever We will in it, for whoever We wish; in the end We have prepared Hell for him in which to burn, disgraced and rejected [18] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 18)

That is, before Allah created the human being, who He made His vicegerent in the earth, He made the entire creation subservient to man, created all things needed in this life. The consequent favours of Allah have been flowing down onto man, from creating and bestowing life, providing for living needs and subjugating other creatures without requesting, such as the sun, moon, atmosphere, rain, etc. These things set your life in motion and you

have nothing to do with them. There are also other constituents of life which you must interact with for them to effectuate their purposes, such as the earth. It does not produce its yield unless you harvest within it and plant your seeds. If you do this, you will find that it has effectuated its purpose and granted you bounteous production.

A careful observer of human civilization and advancement will find that they are the outcome of human interaction with life elements. This is how progress and refinement are hatched. The human being is also further refined by benefiting from the first and most obvious of life essential elements, which effectuate their purpose without human intervention, in yet a new way. An example on this is the scientific scholars being able to make use of the solar power in new ways not know before.

As such, there are laws in this life which whoever masters their use is given the desired results. This is the way the human being enriches life and makes further advancements. Previously, we named this phenomenon the divine grant (*'ata ar-rabubia*); where the believer and the disbeliever, or the obedient and the disobedient, are all equal in relation to accessing it. This explains the statement of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: 'unto him who cares for [no more than enjoyment of] this fleeting life...' (*al-Isra'*: 18). That is the grant of the life of this world, its delights, its refinement, and its progress. 'We readily grant thereof as much as we please, [giving] to whomever it is our will [to give]' (*al-Isra'*: 18). We respond to them by granting them that which they request from the world's delights. It is incumbent upon us that we pay very close attention to the divine grant that Allah has made for the believer and the disbeliever. Indeed, a believer might neglect this kind of grant, be heedless to life essential elements and the means of acting efficiently in the world, while the disbeliever is interacting with them and elevating their standard of living on their account. In this way, the latter might excel the believer, and in fact, end up owning the foodstuffs that are the basis of the believer's life. To be more precise, they could wind up possessing all the essentials of the believer's life. It follows naturally that they would have the final say in the matter, dominance, and the power to subdue their foes. They may create a trial for you in your religion due to what they possess of the essential means of

survival. This is not befitting for the believer. It is despised and unacceptable to the Creator *Glorified is He* for his believing creatures. Consequently, it is not enough that you happily receive the divine grant in the areas of commandment and prohibition, accountability before Allah, and devotion, while leaving and neglecting the means of engaging the world and life most essential material elements without which life would be unsustainable. This happens even though the believer had better be more interested in life's essential elements, which have been made by the Creator of existence, than the disbeliever who does not believe.

It is recommended by our religion that those among the Muslim community do not allow the enemies of Allah to gain dominance over life essential elements to such an extent that the unbeliever outstrips the believer.

Allah's statement: '...as much as we please, [giving] to whomever it is our will [to give]...' (*al-Isra'*: 18). That is to say that things in this world, do not respond spontaneously by themselves to the human interaction with them. Rather, The Divine Will intervenes in this issue. You might take action but achieve no outcome for some kind of divine wisdom or greater purpose dictates that you will not get an outcome. All are not equal in relation to Allah's wisdom. This contains evidence of the limitless nature of Divine Power.

The meaning of *Ma nasha'* (as much as we please) refers to the delights of the life of this world and *liman nurid* (to whomever it is our will to give) refers to the individual that is seeking those delights. The individual described above is seeking the delights of this world and striving to reach the point of efflorescence within the world and its beauty. Then, the Hereafter is not a consideration of theirs nor do they take it into account. For this reason, they do not work for it. So, when they come forward on the day of judgement, they will find their account completely empty, having no share in the eternal bliss. This is due to the fact that the compensation or reward a man is entitled to is depending on work they made in advance. The seekers of earthly delights already take their rewards in this life through fame, distinction, progress, and refinement.

Allah *Glorified is He* has mentioned: 'But as for those who are bent on denying the truth, their [good] deeds are like a mirage in the desert, which the

thirsty supposes to be water – until, when he approaches it, he finds that it was nothing: instead, he finds [that] Allah [has always been present] with him, and [that] He will pay him his account in full – for Allah is swift in reckoning!' (*an-Nur*: 39)

A Mirage is a natural phenomenon experienced by travellers through the desert during the midday. The traveller sees something in front of them that appears to be water until they arrive at the spot. Once there, they find nothing. In the same sense, the disbeliever who does good deeds in the life of this world, when they come upon the Hereafter, they find no reward for their good deeds because they have received their reward in the life of this world. Then the surprise comes: '...he finds [that] Allah [has always been present] with him...' (*an-Nur*: 39). This is a result of the fact that Allah was not a consideration when he did those good deeds in the life of this world. In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* describes it as such: '[This, then, is] the parable of those who are bent on denying their Lord: all their works are as ashes which the wind blows about fiercely on a stormy day: [in the life to come,] they cannot achieve any benefit whatever from all [the good] that they may have wrought: for this [denial of Allah] is indeed the farthest one can go astray.' (*Ibrahim*: 18)

On one occasion, He compared the good deeds of a disbeliever to the water that appears in a mirage, and, on another occasion, He compared their deeds to ashes. This is because when water is mixed with ashes it becomes mud. Mud is soil that is essential for growth and fertile. Hence, it is one of the essential elements of life. Also, He has described it in His words: '...parable of a smooth rock with [a little] earth upon it—and then a rainstorm smites it and leaves it hard and bare. Such as these shall have no gain whatever from all their good works: for Allah does not guide people who refuse to acknowledge the truth' (*al-Baqara*: 264).

This verse of the True Lord *Glorified is He* embodies the frustrated hopes of the disbeliever at the coming of the Hereafter in a clear and captivating example. The good deeds of the disbeliever are like a large flat boulder that is caught in a heavy downpour of rain. What then, do you expect from it? What good lies hidden within it? The True Lord *Glorified is He* then goes on to say: 'Unto him who cares for [no more than the enjoyment of] this fleeting life We

readily grant thereof as much as We please, [giving] to whomever it is Our will [to give]; but in the end We consign him to [the suffering of] hell, which he will have to endure disgraced and disowned! (*al-Isra'*: 18) This means that Hell-fire has been created and prepared for this disbeliever. He will be despised by the people and people generally despise those who are guilty of grave sins. He will also be, 'disowned' (*al-Isra'*: 18) and banished from Allah's mercy.

Allah *Glorified is He* gave us this portrait of a person who desired the transient life of this world while neglecting the Hereafter and the punishment he will earn for his misdeeds. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* offered us the alternate picture by describing a person who is more intelligent and logical in preferring the Hereafter over this worldly life, Allah *Glorified is He* said:

وَمَنْ أَرَادَ الْآخِرَةَ وَسَعَىٰ لَهَا سَعْيَهَا وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ
كَانَ سَعْيُهُمْ مَّشْكُورًا

**But if anyone desires the life to come and strives
after it as he should, as a true believer, his striving
will be thanked [19] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 19)**

The attentive reader of the Quran will find that, in many instances, it presents contrasting pictures to clarify its concepts. The colours of an image stand out when they are presented alongside their alternate colours. This is also why human adversaries reveal the strongest attributes of each other.

We see this usage of lexical polar opposites in many verses in the Book of Allah *Glorified is He* such as the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Behold, (in the life to come) the truly virtuous will indeed be in bliss, whereas, indeed, the wicked will be in a blazing fire,' (*al-Infitar*: 13-14).

In the verse we are studying, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted the words: 'But as for those who want the (good of the) life to come,' (*al-Isra'*: 19) to be in stark contrast with the words: 'As for him who only wants the enjoyment of this fleeting life,' (*al-Isra'*: 18).

Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'But as for those who want the (good of the) life to come and strive for it as it ought to be strived for' (*al-Isra'*: 19). These are

the people who desire the reward of the hereafter and work for it 'and are true believers' (*al-Isra'*: 19) because faith is an essential necessity for one's good deeds to be accepted.

All of the efforts undertaken by human beings in the movements of life must be based on sound faith and intention. In order for a person to earn a reward for his deeds on the Day of Judgment, their mind must be conscious and considerate of Allah *Glorified is He*. This is the only way for the worker's physical deeds to be accepted in the Hereafter, just as a factory worker can only receive his rewards from the manager he works for.

There are many disbelievers, who have served humanity with their inventions and discoveries, but they were not mindful of Allah *Glorified is He* during their efforts. They presented these accomplishments to earn rewards or recognition from other people for their march to develop humankind. For this reason, they deserved what they rightfully received from humanity, in the form of fame and honour. Statues may have been sculpted to tribute them or books were written to record their biographies. In these cases, they have worked and received their rewards from their fellow men.

If an individual builds a mosque, this great deed can potentially take him to paradise if he possesses sincerity and faith in Allah *Glorified is He*. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Whoever builds a mosque for Allah's sake, even if it is the size of a bird's nest, Allah *Glorified is He* will build for him a house in paradise.'⁽¹⁾

However, sometimes we see a manifest sign on the door of a mosque which declares, 'This mosque was built by so-and-so.' Sometimes, the finance to build the mosque might have even been acquired from the alms of charity (*zakat*)! In this manner, that person may have willingly ruined their own good deeds or carried out an action that decreased their reward. Therefore, if a person does a good deed with the intention of garnering fame and publicity, then actually gains such fame and recognition; they will have received their

(1) Narrated by Ibn Majah in his *Sunnan* (738) from the tradition of Jabir ibn 'Abdullah may Allah be pleased with him. Imam Al-Busiri mentioned in *az-Zawa'id* that its chain was sound and that its narrators are trustworthy and reliable.

compensation in this world. The reward has been concluded and they will not find further rewards in the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* also described those who do the good for the hereafter and said: 'They are the ones whose efforts will be rewarded (by Allah),' (*al-Isra'*: 19). It is well known that gratitude causes an increase and abundance in the flow of Allah's blessings. Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'And (remember the time) when your Lord made (this promise) known, "If you are grateful (to Me), I shall most certainly give you more (blessings)"' (*Ibrahim*: 7). How pleasant will a servant's life be, when Allah *Glorified is He* Himself, expresses gratitude to his servant for obedience?

The faithful doers of good deeds will always receive their deserved gratitude. They even receive gratitude from those who differ with their beliefs. Take, for example, a thief who possesses a valuable item that needs protection. Will he place it in the trust of another thief, or with a person of trustworthiness who will protect it with their heart? In essence, the thief does not respect another thief nor do gang members completely trust each other. However, they may fully respect the honesty of a trustworthy individual, even though that individual opposes their actions. In a similar manner, a liar or a treacherous person will respect a truthful and a faithful individual. In the same light, despite the hostility that the disbelievers of Mecca harboured for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and their disbelief in his message, they still entrusted him with their valuables and precious goods. This is because they were confident in his trustworthiness. In fact, they gave him the nickname *al-ameen* (the trustworthy man) despite the fundamental differences in belief that existed between them. They did not accept his message regarding the matters of creed, but when it came to preserving their valuable trusts, they could never cheat themselves. The most reliable and dependable person they could trust was Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him*.⁽¹⁾

(1) *This happened during the migration of the Prophet Muhammad to Medina, as Ibn Hisham mentioned in As-Sirah An-Nabawiyya (2: 485). Prophet Muhammad ordered 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb may Allah be pleased with him, to remain behind in Mecca to fulfill some promises that Prophet Muhammad had made to various people. When Prophet Muhammad was in Mecca, none of his people feared placing their precious possessions in his trust. This was a result of his truthfulness and trustworthiness.*

We have already offered the example of a false witness helping you win a lawsuit that you do not deserve. Even if you use their false testimony to get out of difficulty or an unfavourable judgment, you will still lose all respect for them. Furthermore, you would not consider them worthy of your confidence afterwards. This explains the meaning of the expression, 'Every person aided by your treachery in their plots and tricks, will lose respect for you. If you aide their affairs by being a false witness and assist them in oppressing others with mischief, you have also helped their foot to trample your honour.' Allah said concerning both groups of people:

كَلَّا نُمَدِّ هَتُولَاءَ وَهَتُولَاءَ مِنْ عَطَاءِ رَبِّكَ وَمَا كَانَ عَطَاءُ رَبِّكَ مَحْظُورًا ﴿٢٠﴾

To both the latter and the former, We give some of your Lord's bounty. [Prophet], your Lord's bounty is not restricted [20] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 20)

This means that both of the previously mentioned groups, those who desire the transient life of this world and those who desire the permanence of the Hereafter will be showered with Allah's blessings. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* supplies everyone with life's essential elements, despite the fact that some of these people will use these essential elements for obedience and some of them will use them for disobedience and disbelief. This is akin to giving two men money. The first person may give the money in charity while the second person squanders his money on buying wasteful distractions like alcohol. However, although the divine grant from Allah's Lordship supports the obedient believers as well as the sinners, the ability to worship Allah *Glorified is He* according to His commandments is also a blessing that is only granted to the observant and adherent believers.

As for Allah's saying: '...since your Lord's bestowal is never confined (to one kind of man)' (*al-Isra'*: 20), it means that Allah's blessings are not prohibited from anyone of His creatures, even those who have disbelieved. Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who summoned them into existence and will, therefore, secure the essential elements of their lives. In the same sense, if you invite a guest to your home, you are obligated to host your guest in the appropriate manner.

Here, we observe that Allah *Glorified is He* chose the expression: ‘...your Lord’s bestowal’ (*al-Isra'*: 20). The bestowal that is being mentioned here includes the nurturing blessings that are provided by Allah’s Lordship. Allah *Glorified is He* is the Lord of all that exists, which means that He cultivates and takes care of them. Thus, it was befitting for the word ‘bestowal’ in this verse to be attributed to the Lord *Glorified is He* Who said:

أَنْظُرْ كَيْفَ فَضَّلْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ ۚ وَلِالْآخِرَةِ أَكْبَرُ دَرَجَاتٍ وَأَكْبَرُ تَفْضِيلًا ﴿٢١﴾

See how We have given some more than others – but the Hereafter holds greater ranks and greater favours [21]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 21)

Allah *Glorified is He* has given us theoretical concepts which require faith, but can be deduced through deep insight into His natural creation. If we look closely, we will be convinced with the truth of these concepts.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘Behold how We bestow (on Earth) bounties favoring some of them more than others’ (*al-Isra'*: 21). The attentive reader will notice that Allah *Glorified is He* has not specified which group of people was favoured more than the other groups. The verse did not say, ‘We have favoured the wealthy people over the poor people,’ or, ‘We have favoured the healthy people over the sick people’. This means that all of these groups have been favoured in some areas and disfavoured in other aspects.

People tend to narrow their focus on some favours only. They only recognize the favours of excessive wealth, high-priced possessions, or lofty ranks. This view is certainly mistaken. In order to survey a person’s life properly, we must view it from all of its angles. Allah *Glorified is He* does not want us to be redundant copies of each other. Instead, He wants all the people to be complementary in their transactions and interactions. If we were all complete, inert individuals, with every person perfect in every type of talent, this would sever our ties in society.

Part of Allah’s mercy is favouring some people with certain characteristics and favouring other people with different traits. In this way, you will need the skills of other people which you have been disfavoured in, while other people

will need the blessings that you have. This leads to mutual completion in communities to make life's transactions sound and flowing.

We may be able to escape this short sight by focusing on an important principle. This principle states that the aggregate sum of talents given to each person in mankind is equal to the sum of talents in every other individual. For instance, if one person possesses more money, then perhaps a poorer person has better health. In this way, the end result is complete equality between people in their worldly talents. Thus, the true competition between them is in their piety and good deeds.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'O men! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, Allah is all-knowing, all-aware' (*al-Hujurat*: 13). For that reason, a true Muslim is obliged to observe the manners of Islam in respecting the significance of other individuals. Never look down upon others in whatever amount you have been favoured over them. You must recognize that other individuals have been favoured in different ways than you. A day will surely come when you will direly need their talents.

We have already offered an example for this principle. A man of distinguished status may surely be forced, as a result of urgent circumstances, to request the services of plumbers or other labourers who can perform tasks a rich, notable person, is unable to perform. In this situation, the labourer has been favoured above that man of famous status. Try to imagine the catastrophic results on a community if their street sweepers decided to stop working for a number of days. Even if an individual's job appears simple or lacks glamour, they will still possess roles to fulfil better than other people will. Consider a tailor's craft, regarded modest by most people, but indispensable for sewing notable people's garments before the 'eid celebration.

In this way, we can understand what Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Is it they who distribute your Lord's grace? (Nay, as) it is We who distribute their means of livelihood⁽¹⁾ amongst them in the life of this world. (And) we raised

(1) *Qatada said, 'You may find a person whose speech is disabled and has not talents, but has abundant provisions. On the other hand, you may find a person with vigorous strength a vicious tongue, but had restricted provisions.'* (*Ad-Durr Al-Manthur*, 1: 375)

some of them in degrees above each other, so that they cannot save themselves from each other's subjugation.⁽¹⁾ Your Lord's grace is certainly better than all (the worldly wealth) that they may collect' (*az-Zukhruf*: 32). This means that each one of us has been subjected to the service of others, through the same skills they excel at, by Allah's favour. An Arab poet spoke truthfully when he stated:

People are for the service of other people,
in Bedouin lands or lands that are urban,
They are all here for each other's utility,
Even if they do not sense their subjugation.

Therefore, it is necessary for us to focus on all the angles of an individual's life before assessing their significance, for indeed, all of us are equal before Allah *Glorified is He*. No one among us can claim to be attributed to Allah *Glorified is He* in terms of lineage or familial relation. Nothing links us to Him *Glorified is He* except being His servants. We are all equally granted His gifts of provision. No one is more entitled to His provision than anyone else is.

A logical individual looking upon life should never consider himself distinctly superior than other people. He should recognize his need for the talents of others and effectively cease his self-conceit. An apparently simple person may show natural gifts that allow them to excel within particular fields and intelligence becomes evident when work fortuitously merges with talent. Some individuals whom people look upon with condescension, could perhaps be geniuses if their work casually intertwines with their skills.

Allah *Glorified is He* said in this verse: 'But (remember that) the life to come will be higher in its degrees and greater in its merits and bounties' (*al-Isra'*: 21). If the rivalry and competition in this life is based on its natural laws of causality, the matter is different in the Hereafter. In the Hereafter, the laws are not relating to causality, but are related to the pleasure of Allah *Glorified is He* Who created the laws of this world. This is the standard of competition in the Hereafter.

(1) (*Sakhkharah, yusakhkhiruh*): He subjugated it, He subjected it, or He subdued it. [*(Al-Qamus Al-Qawim)* 1: 307]

If you contemplate your life in this world and compare it with the Hereafter, you will find that the Hereafter is more dignified and prominent. Your years in the life of this world are numbered and this period will ultimately end with your death. The world remains after your death as a test for other people. In the same respect, all of life's blessings will dissipate, being exposed to the vicissitudes of fate which occur to human beings. Rich people can become poor and healthy people can fall ill. Since this life's blessings come according to your efforts and interactions with its forces, its good fortune will not be guaranteed or assured for any person who was initially blessed. Even if you are given good fortune and a high standard of living in the life of this world, this fortune can still be disturbed by advent of death or the exposure to the vicissitudes of fate.

On the other hand, your years in the Hereafter are endlessly lengthened. Its blessings and pleasures will not diminish because they are granted to you according to the Lordship of the Giver *Glorified is He*. Evanescence will not occur in this eternal realm of guaranteed existence. Therefore, which of these two worlds is more superior? Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* called upon us to contemplate, reflect, and choose the more profitable of these two transactions. Once you realize that, exert yourself in its trade and accept no substitute! There is no ground for comparison between the good fortune of this life and the blessings of the Hereafter as the Hereafter is superior and grander.

Some time ago, I travelled with a group of people to San Francisco. We passed by a hotel, not for residence, but to view its splendid spectacles of beauty, elegance and aesthetic brilliance. The place was a marvel of creativity and luxury. When I noticed some of my esteemed travelling companions captivated by its magnificence, I asked them, 'If human beings have prepared this place for other humans, what would the Lord of humans prepare for them?'

The blessings of this life and the manifestations of its beauty should entice our yearning for the everlasting blessings of paradise. They should not give rise to feelings of envy and animosity. We must use the material icons of grandeur and brilliance that are possessed by others as a means to embrace more faith in Allah *Glorified is He*. Then, we are obligated to increase this faith with proper deliberation.

If all the elements of advancement and sophisticated engineering in this world's technologies and architectural structures are the products of human designers and labourers, the wonderful blessings of their Creator in the Hereafter will certainly be more transcendent. The blessings of this life were prepared by human beings and the blessings of the Hereafter were prepared by Allah *Glorified is He* the Creator, Himself.

In addition, although luxurious human technologies have evolved to provide your needs in response to slight verbal or tactile commands, these worldly machines still demand an initial command to serve you. On the other hand, the delights of paradise, which the Creator has prepared for His righteous servants⁽¹⁾, will present themselves to you as a result of your mere intentions and pre-thoughts!

Thus, if the Hereafter is more exalted and prominent, you are obliged to hasten toward your Lord's straight path. This path is the Way of the One, Allah *Glorified is He* Said:

لَا يَجْعَلْ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَهًا آخَرَ فَتَقْعُدَ مَذْمُومًا مَّخْذُولًا ﴿٢٢﴾

Set up no other god beside God, or you will end up disgraced and forsaken [22] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 22)

Allah *Glorified is He* granted you provisions in this world and provided you the means to access these provisions. He gave you the necessary essentials in life, started your creation into existence, and uplifted you from poverty. In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* has provided these blessings to everyone, including disbelievers. Furthermore, He has prepared the highest stations for you in the Hereafter, in everlasting blessings that do not expire or dwindle away.

(1) On the authority of Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him, Prophet Muhammad said, 'Allah *Glorified is He* has promised: "I have prepared for my righteous slaves, things which no eye has seen and no ear has heard, and that have not been the object of any human being's imagination."' The confirmation of this occurs in the Book of Allah *Glorified is He* where Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'And (as for all such believers,) no human being can imagine what blissful delights, as yet hidden, await them (in the life to come) as a reward for all that they did' (as-Sajda: 17).

After these considerations, it is only natural for a servant to persevere to obey Allah's Commands and to direct himself toward Him. The heedful servant should strive to stay in Allah's constant company. Therefore, do not direct worship to any other deity besides Allah *Glorified is He* for this would cost you the goodness of these blessings.

Polytheists will only find lowliness and renunciation in the life of this world and in the Hereafter. These disbelievers will be astonished with their deprived outcomes on the Day of Judgment, as they meet the Lord Who had called upon them to believe in Him. 'Instead, he finds (that) Allah (has always been present) with him' (*an-Nur*: 39). Then, they will express regret, at a time when regret will not benefit them. The opportunity has slipped from their hands, as Allah *Glorified is He* said, regarding the polytheists: '...so as not to sit (forcibly) (*taq'ud*), disgraced and forsaken' (*al-Isra*': 22). Indeed, their sitting here is not a voluntary action. An individual is not obligated to sit unless he has no energy to stand. This expression implies the meaning that their power is depleted. Their legs have surrendered and can no longer support them.

When the Quran addressed the state of the person who has lost their power and hope, it used the word 'sit' (*qu'ud*). The Quran did not use the phrase, '...so as not to lie down,' because the punishment of the Hereafter does not allow for rest. The Quranic expression, '...so as not to sit (forcibly),' accurately depicted the degree of the punishment. It is a punishment that does not affect the limbs and the physical constitution, but it affects the conscious soul that is able to perceive and sense pain. Doctors anaesthetize patients before proceeding with surgical operations, as the process of anaesthesia deprives the body of its conscious state and is thus unable to sense pain, when this component of pain is removed.

Allah *Glorified is He* used the word 'sitting' in another sense, when He said: 'Allah has exalted those (believers) who strive hard with their possessions and their lives far above those (believers) who remain passively sitting' (*an-Nisa*': 95). He also said in another verse: 'And (those) elderly sitting women, who no longer ask for any marital relations' (*an-Nur*: 60). In essence, the word 'sitting' in these verses indicates a lack of power. At the same time, the word *taq'ud* does not indicate a state of rest, as the person is not lying down in sleep, but remains in a perpetual state of pain and disturbance.

A poet once expressed their contempt for a particular person in the following couplet:

‘Leave all the traits of good character, without striving to attain them.

Sit, for indeed you are the one who dresses (fashionably) and dines.’

Allah has described the people who enjoin partners with Him in worship as being: ‘...disgraced (*madhmuman*)’ (*al-Isra'*: 22). Their disbelief will earn them disgrace among the people. Allah *Glorified is He* also said that they will be: ‘...forsaken (*makhdhula*)’ (*al-Isra'*: 22). Being forsaken means being in a state where there is no aid or assistance available. That person will be in the most remote location, where they cannot be helped or defended by anyone. Allah said concerning this group: ‘How is it that (now) you cannot support one another? Nay, but on that Day, they would willingly surrender (to Allah)’ (*as-Saffat*: 25-26).

Allah *Glorified is He* said:

وَقَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا ۖ إِنَّمَا يُبَلِّغُنَّ عَنْكَ الْقَبْرَ
أَحَدُهُمَا أَوْ كِلَاهُمَا فَلَا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا أُفٍّ وَلَا نَهَرُهُمَا وَقُلْ لَهُمَا قَوْلًا كَرِيمًا ﴿٢٣﴾

Your Lord has commanded that you should worship none but Him, and that you be kind to your parents. If either or both of them reach old age with you, say no word that shows impatience with them, and do not be harsh with them, but speak to them respectfully [23] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 23)

After Allah *Glorified is He* directed us to the most critical sin that disrupts belief: ‘Do not worship any deity other than Allah’ (*al-Isra'*: 22), Allah *Glorified is He* clarified that faith is not complete until good deeds are performed. In addition to knowing Allah and directing oneself towards Him, you must observe the obligations for which He made you responsible. This explains why faith and good deeds are mentioned together in many verses throughout the Noble Book. This includes Allah’s statement: ‘Woe unto every slanderer, faultfinder! (Woe unto him) who amasses wealth and counts it as a safeguard, thinking that his wealth will make him live forever!’ (*al-Humaza*: 1-3)

The benefits and fruits of faith are righteous actions. When you take this righteous path, you should expect opposition from the people of falsehood, corruption, and misguidance. They will never invite you to their friendship or establish peaceful relations with you. As a result, you must fully arm yourself with truth, strength, and perseverance so that you can oppose their attack.

Thus, religion is not only a word of faith articulated by the tongue. Evidence for this can be seen in the disbelievers of Mecca, who undeniably failed to attest, 'There is no deity worthy of worship except Allah'. If the matter of faith was simple, they could have easily attested to the Oneness of Allah *Glorified is He* and easily voiced their allegiance to it.

However, they knew very well that faith had its imperative rulings and practical responsibilities. The logical consequences of faith in Allah are to live as He wishes and to implement His Way. This was the vantage point from which the disbelievers rejected faith in the Oneness of Allah *Glorified is He*. Moreover, they rejected the idea of emulating Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who come to deliver Allah's will to them.

The Way of Allah *Glorified is He* is only revealed to a messenger, who then carries it and conveys it to the people, just as Allah *Glorified is He* has said: '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): for, verily, He is Exalted and Wise' (*ash-Shura*: 51) .

The first principle within the Way of Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned in the verse we are studying is: 'For your Lord (*Rabbuka*) has ordained that you shall worship none but Him' (*al-Isra*': 23). Allah *Glorified is He* chose to use the word *Rabbuka* (your Lord) as opposed to the word *Allah*, as He has created, nurtured, and educated us, through the attributes of His Lordship. He oversees our affairs and gives us blessings out of His bounty. Therefore, this expression is more likely to elicit the servants' obedience, because human beings should feel embarrassed at disobeying their Benefactor and Lord.

'For your Lord has ordained' (*al-Isra*': 23); in this statement, the address is directed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because he is

the individual who has attained the highest standard of cultivation and decorum. This cultivation was eminent because it is Allah *Glorified is He* who taught and nurtured his character. In the Noble Hadith, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'My Lord has educated me and He did so with benevolence'.⁽¹⁾

The meaning of the word *qada* is (ordained) or (ruled) because only a judge is able to issue a ruling. It also entails the connotation of a command or an order. In this verse, it makes use of both meanings. Allah *Glorified is He* has ordered, with emphasis and without equivocation, that no deity should be worshipped besides Him. This judgment is interminably binding. The word *qada* can also be used to indicate the meaning of the words (decreed) and (created). We can see this in the verse where Allah *Glorified is He* said: '(He) decreed (*qada*) that they become seven heavens' (*Fussilat*: 12). It can also indicate that a person has reached one's objective. This is expressed in the verse: '(But) then, when Zayd had concluded (*qada*) the union with her, we granted her marriage to you' (*al-Ahzab*: 37). The word *qada* can also mean 'completing a period of time', as seen in the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'And when Musa (Moses) had fulfilled (*qada*) his term' (*al-Qasas*: 29). It also occurs with the meaning of 'willed, intended and decreed to do something', as exemplified by Allah's saying: 'It is He who grants life and deals death; and when He wills (*qada*) a thing to be, He but says unto it, "Be," and it is' (*Ghafir*: 68). Therefore, the word *qada* has many meanings. Nonetheless, all of these meanings indicate the occurrence or the finalization of a binding or an emphasized ruling.

As for Allah's saying: '...that you shall worship (*ta'budu*) none but Him' (*al-Isra'*: 23). The Arabic word *ta'budu* (to worship) means the performance of *al-'ibada*. *Al-'ibada* is the observation of obedience to a commander's orders and prohibitions. You should listen attentively to these orders, with the

(1) 'Abd Ar-Rahman ibn 'Ali As-Shafi'i As-Shaybani said in his book *Tamyiz Al-Tayyib min Al-Khabith feema Yaduur-u 'ala Alsinat An-Nas min Al-Hadith* (pg. 17), concerning this tradition: 'It was presented by Al-'Askari in *Al-Amthal* on the authority of 'Ali may Allah be pleased with him, with a chain of narrators that extends to the Prophet in an extended narration. Also, our sheikh has mentioned that the chain of narrators for this tradition is weak, but its meaning is true.'

intention of effectuating his commands and avoiding his prohibitions. If he has not issued a command or a prohibition for a particular matter, then he has made the matter essentially lawful for you, while giving you the elective preference to engage or abstain from it.

The polytheist disbelievers worshipped idols, engaged in gathering pieces of stone from the desert and worked diligently with their tools to fashion these stones into effigies and statues. They would mend these idols if they broke and prop them up if they fell. Despite these actions, they knew the loathsome lowliness of these pieces of stones. For instance, one of them witnessed a fox urinating on the head of an idol. The man said in utter contempt for the foolishness of those who worshipped the idols:

Can that be a lord with its head urinated upon by foxes?!

Indeed, degraded is the head that is urinated upon by foxes.

When the idolaters were asked difficult questions regarding these false deities they claimed to worship, they responded, 'These (idols) do not possess the power to harm or benefit us. We only worship them because they draw us nearer to Allah'.

How can they worship (perform *al-'ibada*) towards such idols, when the definition of worship is attention to the worshipped one's commands and prohibitions? What have these idols commanded them to do or ordered them to abstain from? Their words were only compounded lies.

Allah *Glorified is He* said in this verse: '...that you shall worship (*ta'budu*) none but Him' (*al-Isra'*: 23). In Arabic, this method of speech is referred to as a method of limitation (*qasr*). The sentence means that worship has been limited to Allah *Glorified is He* alone and no other deity shares this attribute with Him. If the verse had been, 'For your Lord has ordained that you should worship Him,' someone might have added, 'We may also worship other deities alongside Him,' because the verse's wording would have allowed the method of lexical attachments (*'atf*). However, this verse did not allow for such attachments.

To clarify the difference between the Arabic methods of lexical attachment (*'atf*) and lexical limitation (*qasr*), we can look at the following two sentences.

The sentence, 'I fought the first person, as well as the second person, as well as the third person', uses the Arabic method of lexical attachment (*'atf*), by using the phrase 'as well as'. Conversely, the sentence, 'I did not fight anyone beside the first person', uses the method of lexical limitation and effectively rules out the possibility of further lexical attachments.

Therefore, the Arabic method of lexical limitation (*qasr*) was utilized within this verse we are studying, to convey the following message, 'Limit your worship, strictly, to Allah *Glorified is He* alone and never direct your worship to anyone beside Him.'

After that, Allah *Glorified is He* assigned a responsibility to us. This is the second commandment we must observe after worshipping Him: 'And (do good) benevolently unto (your) parents' (*al-Isra'*: 23). Allah *Glorified is He* has linked the act of worshipping Him and the act of being benevolent and dutiful towards one's parents in many verses in the Quran. For instance, He said in another verse: 'And worship Allah (alone), and do not ascribe divinity, in any way, to anyone beside Him. And do good benevolently unto your parents' (*an-Nisa'*: 36). He also said: 'Say (to them), "Come and let me convey unto you what Allah has (really) forbidden you from doing: Do not ascribe divinity, in any way, to aught beside Him. (Do not offend your parents) but rather, do good unto your parents benevolently"' (*al-An'am*: 151). He also said: 'We have enjoined upon man benevolent goodness towards his parents,' (*al-'Ankabut*: 8).

However, this begs the question. Why has Allah *Glorified is He* linked the act of worshipping Him and the act of being benevolent towards one's parents? Is it the former act of worship that logically leads to the latter act of kindness towards the parents, or does the latter kindness towards the parents logically obligate the primary devoutness to Allah *Glorified is He*?

Our answer is that both possibilities have equal validity. The fact is that Allah *Glorified is He* is the unseen source of existence and belief in Him requires the use of the mind in consideration and reflection. On the other hand, one's parents are effortlessly perceived by human senses as they are the immediate causes of his existence. They have raised and educated you, furnished all your life's necessities and are the constant sources of tenderness and compassion for you.

Therefore, fundamentally, parental care and nurturing is clear and lucid to the healthy senses. In contrast, Allah's care and nurturing is clear and lucid to the sane minds. Thus, Allah's order that people should be benevolently dutiful towards their parents is clear evidence that the worship of Allah *Glorified is He* alone, without associating partners to him, is an obligation. Undeniably, Allah *Glorified is He* is responsible for your existence in the ultimate sense. He alone cultivated your existence and is the One who nurtured and cared for you, while granting you infinitely greater favours than your parents. Furthermore, your parents have not nurtured you with their own energy, but with the provisions that actually originated from Allah's bestowal.

In effect, the right of Allah *Glorified is He* to be worshipped alone without associating partners with Him must be bound with the right of parents to be respected and treated with reverence. We should take each one of them as evidence for the other.

When Allah *Glorified is He* commanded us to worship Him in this verse, He introduced the clause using the method of negation. He said: '...that you shall worship none but Him' (*al-Isra'*: 23). This means that He prohibited us from worshipping any other deity beside Him. However, when mentioning the rights of the parents, He did not use the method of negation. For instance, Allah *Glorified is He* did not say, 'Do not offend your parents'. This is because the rights of the parents are clear and do not need additional emphasis or intellectual proof.

If the sentence was, 'Do not do mistreat to your parents', it makes their mistreatment a presumable possibility, while in nature, any mistreatment of one's parents is unfathomable and inconceivable. Even if you deny that a respected individual has committed an inappropriate action, and that respected individual is not in need of such negation, you may have defamed that person lexically by linking the inappropriate action with his name. For example, if a man is widely known for his righteousness and piety, and you say, 'That righteous man is not a drunkard', this may be perceived as an inadvertent gesture of ridicule. Linking the man's name with drunkenness, even by negation, implies that some people suspected him of being so. This is the basis for the Arabic adage, 'Denying that a respected person has done a disgraceful action

can be a disgrace to them'. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* did not mention 'mistreatment' in association with the parents because it should not cross any person's mind that a child can mistreat their parents in any sense. However, after understanding the immense favour and tremendous good your parents have done for you, never forget that the favour of Allah upon you is greater. Parents give birth to their child but could choose to place the child in the care of someone else. However, your Lord, Allah *Glorified is He* is your constant Provider and will never place you in someone else's care. When Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'And [do good] benevolently (*ihsan*) unto [your] parents' (*al-Isra'*: 23), He omitted the phrase, '...do good,' in the verse⁽¹⁾ and used the noun *ihsan*, instead of using a verb *ahsinuu*, as the noun exerts greater emphasis. Allah *Glorified is He* then said: 'Should one or both of them attain old age in your care, never say, 'Ugh,' to them or scold them, but [always] speak unto them with reverent speech' (*al-Isra'*: 23). Allah *Glorified is He* has instructed us to behave benevolently towards our parents in many verses in the Quran. Some of the verses do not mention a justification for this divine commandment. Other verses mention a clear justification, such as the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'We have enjoined upon man [among the best of deeds] benevolence towards his parents. In pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give birth to him' (*al-Ahqaf*: 15). Allah *Glorified is He* also said in another verse: 'His mother carried him by bearing strain upon strain' (*Luqman*: 14).

In the two previous verses, Allah *Glorified is He* based the rationale for benevolence towards one's parents by mentioning the role of the mother in particular. These verses did not address the father's favours and rights. Why is the father's role not mentioned? Where is the acknowledgement of his continuous efforts throughout the years to raise his children?

If we closely study the verses that ordered benevolence towards one's parents, we will find a general consideration for the roles assumed by both parents in the verse: '...as they cherished and reared me when I was a child' (*al-Isra'*: 24). However, to understand the difference in the roles of each parent, we have to consider the following concept. Before the father's role

(1) Translator's note: Hence, the placement of the word 'do' between brackets in the translation of the verse.

even begins in nurturing the child, the mother will have already played a larger role in the child's arrival to this world. A mother once argued in a dispute over the custody of her child, 'He (the disputant father) carried him while he was weightless and I carried him while he was weighty. He released him with pleasure and I released him with pain'.

This explains why the Quran mentioned the special role of the mother in many verses. There are special issues which she has to confront alone without her husband's involvement.⁽¹⁾ In addition, these maternal efforts take place before the child reaches the age of discernment and thus, the child is unable to sense his mother's earlier efforts. Allah *Glorified is He* desired to remind us of the sacrifices of the mother because a large portion of them were made before we are able to sense or perceive them.

This differs entirely from the role of the father, although this role should still be acknowledged and appreciated by the child. His father is responsible for securing all the essentials of his life. When he is in need of something as a child, he is clearly told, 'Wait until your father comes home (from work)'. Thus, the father's role is clear to the children and needs no further elaboration.

The verse instructs us to treat our parents with benevolence and makes specific mention of the period of their old age. The verses mention this particular period because when the parents are in the prime of their lives, they are not objects of neglect and mistreatment by their children. Disrespect or impropriety towards them is not the natural assumption. This is because they are able to confront life's challenges in the physical and mental prime of their lives. In fact, during this period, children adhere very closely to their parents, earnestly hoping for their pleasure to reap from their good fortunes.

On the other hand, after the onset of old age and the appearance of senility, they become weaker and need other people's help. The mother, who was once a giver, will become a receiver of help, while the father, who was once the family's main source of income, will become a dependent. This

(1) In his work of *Quranic exegesis* (5/3967), Al-Qurtubi said 'The referents here are the difficulties of pregnancy, child-labor, nursing and child-rearing. All of these are shouldered by the mother without the father's help. These represent the three domains from which the father has been restricted'.

explains the actions of Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* in the Hadith of the *Al-Aminat* and *al-Maraghim*. He was upon the pulpit giving a sermon when the Companions heard him saying, 'Amen!' He remained quiet for a short while and then said, 'Amen!' After a few moments, once more, he said, 'Amen!' After he descended from the pulpit, the companions asked him, 'We heard you say Amen three times.'

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* responded, 'The Angel Gabriel visited me and said, "Woe unto the one who is present when you are mentioned (in front of him) and they fail to pray for you! Say Amen!" So I said, Amen. He (Angel Gabriel) continued, "Woe onto the one who passes the month of Ramadan without being forgiven! Say Amen!" So I said, Amen. He (Angel Gabriel) finally said, "Woe onto the one whose parents, or one of them, reaches old age and he fails to enter Paradise on account of his good treatment of them! Say Amen!" So I said, Amen.'⁽¹⁾

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* specifically mentioned the period of old age because it is marked by a state of limitation and weakness. This explains what one of the philosophers meant when he said, 'The best marriage is the early marriage, because it is the only way to have a child who will be your father when you reach the infancy of old age.' This philosopher compared infancy with old age because both of them entail weakness and need the care and concern (of others).

Allah *Glorified is He* said in His true words: 'It is Allah who creates you (all) in a state of weakness, and then, after weakness, ordains strength (for you), and then, after (a period of) strength, ordains weakness and grey hair (in old age)' (*ar-Rum*: 54). Those who get married and bear children at an early age will have someone from their offspring to undertake the responsibility of helping him in their old age.

(1) Narrated by Ahmad in his *Musnad* (2/346) from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra *may Allah be pleased with him*, who recalled that the Prophet said, 'Woe unto him! Woe unto him! Woe unto him, who has seen his parents reaching old age and fails to earn paradise on account of his good treatment of them.' Its long version (which had no mention of Angel Gabriel *peace be upon him*) has been narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his *Sunnan* (3545). At-Tirmidhi said regarding this Hadith, "It is a Hadith that is classified as *hasan* and *gharib*."

The individual who intently studies Allah's saying: 'Should one or both of them attain old age in your care' (*al-Isra'*: 23) will notice the phrase, '...in your care'. This means that they have no one else to look after them, like a brother, sister or relative that can share this responsibility. In that case, you should regard this responsibility highly without any evasion. Indeed, it is a dignified responsibility to attend to.

The concept of devoutness to one's parents extends even after they have passed away. You should constantly pray to Allah to forgive them. Then, you should fulfil any contractual agreements that they might have made without completion. In the same sense, we must maintain the familial bonds that would not be maintained without them, by maintaining constant relations and ties of affection with their relatives, friends, and loved ones.

Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* continued to maintain the ties of respect with the friends of his first wife, Lady Khadija *may Allah be pleased with her* after she had passed away. He always received them warmly and showed them great reverence.⁽¹⁾

We direly need to study this exalted standard of Islamic character, as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* even extended these interactions with disbelievers. In fact, Lady Asma' bint Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with them both* came to Prophet Muhammad to ask about helping her disbelieving mother who had come to ask her for aide. The Prophet said to her, 'Maintain the ties with your mother.'⁽²⁾

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- (1) *On the authority of 'Aisha may Allah be pleased with her who said, 'Hala bint Khuwaylid, the sister of Khadija may Allah be pleased with them asked to enter to Prophet Muhammad's house. Thereupon, he remembered the way of Khadija in asking permission may Allah be pleased with her and how it had given him comfort. He said, "O Almighty Allah. Hala bint Khuwaylid!" So I felt jealous and said, "Why are you mentioning one an old woman from Quraysh who has passed away, especially when Allah Glorified is He has given you a better wife in her place."' This narration was narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2437). Another narration (2434) mentioned that whenever he would slaughter a sheep, he would say, 'Send some of it to the friends of Khadija.'*
- (2) *On the authority of Asma' bint Abu Bakr may Allah be pleased with them who said: "My mother had come to me while she was an idolatress, after the agreement between Prophet Muhammad and Quraysh was signed. So I sought the counsel of Prophet Muhammad and asked, "O Messenger of Allah! My mother has come to me (expecting my company or=*

The scope of this concept extends further than that. In addition to treating our parents with kindness if they are disbelievers, we are even ordered to treat them benevolently when they are actively engaged in calling us to disbelief. With all of these considerations, Allah *Glorified is He* has said: ‘(Revere your parents,) Yet, if they force you with great effort to ascribe divinity to any deity with Me, in something which your mind cannot accept (as divine), do not obey them; but (even then) bear their company in this world’s life with kindness’ (*Luqman*: 15).

This concept of benevolence to one’s parents expresses the grandness of this religion and the Mercy of the Creator towards these parents, even in their state of unfaith and hostile disbelief. It is narrated ⁽¹⁾ that the Friend of Allah, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), was once visited by a guest at night. He wanted to host the guest and questioned him about his religion. The man replied that he was a Magian (Fire Worshipper). Thereupon, Prophet Ibrahim turned away from him and the guest left. As soon as he did that, Allah *Glorified is He* reproached his conduct with that guest, ‘O Ibrahim! I have provided him with bounteous support within My dominion. I feed him, give him drink and clothe him while he is a disbeliever in Me. Do you then turn away from him and desire to change his religion in order that he might remain with you for a night?’

Prophet Ibrahim hurried behind the man and told him about Allah’s revelation. The man replied, ‘Indeed, Great is a Lord who will reproach his loved ones on account of his enemies.’ At this point, the man embraced faith in the Oneness of Allah *Glorified is He* and that Ibrahim was a messenger of Allah.

Some academic researchers of oriental studies have truncated understandings and limited grasps regarding the graceful Quranic style. They claimed that there is a contradiction between Allah’s verses: ‘...bear them company in this world’s life with kindness (*ma’ruf*)’ (*Luqman*: 15) and His statement: ‘You will not find people who (truly) believe in Allah and the Last Day and (at the same time) love (*yuwaadun*) anyone who contends against Allah and His

= aid) and she is still refusing Islam. Should I receive her with care?” He responded, “Yes, receive her and maintain the ties with your mother.” This was a narration by Muslim in his *sahih* (1003) and Al-Bukhari in his *sahih* as well (5979).

(1) The story of the fire-worshipping guest who visited Ibrahim

Apostle, even though they be their fathers, or their sons, or their brothers or (others of) their kindred' (*al-Mujadala*: 22).

These researchers of oriental studies asked, 'How can the Quran issue a command to honourably accompany our parents and to extend courtesies unto them while prohibiting us from adoring those who are at odds with Allah and His Messenger?' Had these individuals understood the provisions of the Arabic style embodied within the Quran, they would have known that the words *ma'ruf* (good treatment and courtesy) are different from the word *yuwaadun* (adoring and loving).

Good treatment and courtesy are extended by a person to those whom he loves as well as those whom he does not like. Whether they are believers or disbelievers, you should feed all people if they are hungry, give them drink if they are thirsty and clothe him if they are not clothed. Adoration, on the other hand, is only for those whom you love because it is of the affairs of the heart.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: '...and never say, 'Ugh,' to them and do not scold them, but always speak unto them with reverent speech' (*al-Isra*': 23). This is an instruction of divine origin which takes the mental condition of the aging parents into account. It advises the children to use a measure of intelligence and astuteness as well as good manners and tenderness in their interactions with their parents during this period.

The father, who once generously provided for his children, is currently in need of their help. After he was strong and capable to earn a living, he is now confined to his home or even bedridden. Care for him requires awareness, good judgment, and tact, in order to avoid injuring him emotionally in this delicate situation.

Think critically about Allah's words: '...never say, "Ugh," to them' (*al-Isra*': 23). This is a simple word that can be uttered as an involuntary response to frustration or aggravation without the slightest bit of forethought. Allah *Glorified is He* has prohibited us from using this involuntary expression, as this is not a word that you can have in your dictionary while dealing with your parents.

The word is a verbal noun in the Arabic language, which means, 'I am irritated and frustrated.' It is a natural human state in many settings, but Allah

Glorified is He has warned you of its consequences and ordered you to control this emotional state by avoiding the use of this expression.

If Allah has prohibited us from using this slight expression of discontent with one's parents, He has prohibited us from any greater expressions of annoyance with our parents. The prohibition of this word represents the proscription of all disdainful speech and actions. Allah *Glorified is He* then added emphasis to this command with His statement: '...and do not scold them' (*al-Isra'*: 23). The Arabic word used here is '*tanharhuma*', which comes from the word '*nahr*'. *Nahr* is harsh rebuking or lambasting of a person. It is an emotional response that results from frustration and is clearly harsher than the slight expression, 'Ugh'.

We occasionally see these scenes of discontent in many families. Imagine, for instance, a son giving his father a cup of tea. If the father's hand trembles and spills the tea all over his son's expensive rug, the son may utter, 'Ugh!' in his frustration. He may even utter harsher remarks of disapproval that hurt the feelings of the father. Therefore, you must be careful not to sigh in frustration or scold your parents at any moment. Be very wary of expressions like these which flow from the tongue instantly, leaving you without time to reflect upon their consequences.

After that clear prohibition, we are given a new command that emphasizes the concept of benevolence, '...but (always) speak unto them with reverent speech' (*al-Isra'*: 23). This is a fitting moment to mention the story ⁽¹⁾ of a young man whose father spilled a container of food upon his garment. The son started taking the food that had fallen upon his garment and ate it while saying to his father, 'May Allah *Glorified is He* feed you as you have fed me!' In this manner, he had taken a mishap and turned it into a praiseworthy favour. There is also the story of another young man who had thrown himself at his mother's feet in respect until she said, 'Enough, my son!' He responded by saying, 'If you truly love me, do not prevent me from an action which will deliver me to Paradise, by revering you!' This kind of reverent speech is a

(1) The story of the son who licked the food that his father spilled over him and pray for his father

manifestation of good behaviour and intelligence. This is especially true if they have reached a disabling age or have fallen in illness, as these states place people in the need of others. Children are the persons most obligated to take care of the parents during situations such as these. This is particularly important in private situations where a person may be inappropriately uncovered. In these moments, the parents should be sheltered from the eyes of all people, except their children and beloved family members.

Imagine an elderly father who is in a state of infirmity. He may need someone to help him relieve and clean himself at the washroom. In a situation such as this, the appropriate response of the son towards his father should be, 'Take it easy, my dear father! Grant me an opportunity to reciprocate the favours you have granted me earlier, as you have helped me in this situation many times when I was a child!' In this manner, the son is behaving lovingly and gently with his father. He is not showing any frustration or annoyance, but actually, commiseration and sympathy.

This is the reverent speech that children must use at all times. For instance, your father may visit your home and accidentally break one of the accessories in your house. In such a situation, you should offer the following consolation, 'It is nothing important, my dear father. I had actually been thinking of buying a new one'. You can then choose to say other expressions that would be classified as examples of reverent speech. This speech maintains the dignity of parents and is not injurious to their feelings.

In many instances, sickness accompanies the onset of old age. Indeed, you may see either parent bedridden or completely disabled during this period (May Allah grant mental and physical soundness to them all). For this reason, they will be in the most demanding need of someone who will alleviate their difficulties and console them. Moreover, they will need someone by their side to offer hope of a speedy recovery and to remind them that others who shared this condition were cured by Allah *Glorified is He* and are now in a healthy state.

Additionally, you need to mention the favours that your parents have granted to you during your infancy and childhood. Remember the loving tenderness and compassion they showed you, and that this parental affection increased when you were weaker or in sickness. You will see that the poorer

son is given more consideration by his parents than his rich brother and that the sick or disabled child is given more attention than the healthy. Those who are absent are considered more than those who are present and the young are cared for more than the old are. In this manner, the extent of the child's need dictates the level of the caregiver's compassion.

Therefore, there is a very important conclusion we cannot neglect. If filial piety is an obligation during the period of the parents' health, capability, and strength, it is even more binding during their old age, incapacity, and sickness, Allah *Glorified is He* said, concerning good manners with parents:

وَآخْفِضْ لَهُمَا جَنَاحَ الذَّلِيلِ مِنَ الرَّحْمَةِ وَقُلْ رَبِّ ارْحَمْهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيَانِي صَغِيرًا ﴿٢٤﴾

**And lower your wing in humility towards them in kindness
and say, 'Lord, have mercy on them, just as they cared for
me when I was little' [24] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 24)**

The word *ikhfid* comes from the Arabic word *khafd* (lowering) and this is the opposite of the Arabic word *raf* (lifting or raising). Regarding the verse's phrase, 'the wings of tenderness,' it is well known that a bird raises and flutters its wings as it prepares for flight. In contrast, when it envelops its youngsters with kindness to embrace and feed them, it lowers its wings.

Therefore, in this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* has provided us with an animated depiction that we are ordered to imitate in our interaction with our parents. We should envelop them with kindness and lower our wings for them. This expression implies obedience, kindness, humility, and compassion. Likewise, you should never imitate the bird which raises its wings in order to soar past others.

On many occasions the Wise Lawgiver, Allah *Glorified is He* grants us examples and parables of mercy and gentleness from the behaviour of birds. Allah *Glorified is He* has made them a role model and an example for us. If you observe a bird enveloping its brood under its wings to feed them, you will witness a wondrous sight. The young birds are not able to masticate or pulverize their food. They may also lack the function which aids them in swallowing the food, and so, their parents fulfil this function by preparing their food for easy digestion. During this process, you will see the parent bird

and its young offspring dancing with joy and happiness. Therefore, Allah's saying: '...the wings of your tenderness (*dhull*)' (*al-Isra*: 24) is a metonymical reference to humility.

The Arabic word *dhull* (tenderness) can be used to mean 'subjugation to conquest' or to mean 'mercy and compassion'. Allah *Glorified is He* stated in another verse: 'O you who have believed, if you ever abandon your faith, Allah will bring forth, in time, people whom He loves and who love Him, humble (*adhilla*) towards the believers, superior over the disbelievers' (*al-Ma'ida*: 54). If the intended meaning of the word *adhilla* here meant 'subjugation to conquest', Allah *Glorified is He* would have said, '...humble under the believers.' However, the intended meaning here is 'humility'. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* said, '...humble towards the believers.' This meaning is also emphasized by the remaining part of the statement: '...superior over the disbelievers' (*al-Ma'ida*: 54) which means that they are forcible and stronger in attitude towards the disbelievers. In another verse with a similar meaning, Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Muhammad is Allah's Apostle; and those who are (truly) with him are firm and unyielding towards the disbelievers, (yet) full of mercy towards one another' (*al-Fath*: 29).

Indeed, the Creator has not created human beings as unconditionally gentle or unconditionally firm creatures. Rather, the believer should have the flexibility and pliancy which enables him to assume the more appropriate stance in every situation that he encounters. If he encounters an arrogant disbeliever, he is firm. On the other hand, if he encounters a believer, he is modest and humble.

We can clearly observe this phenomenon by looking upon the biographies of Prophet Muhammad's companions, Abu Bakr and 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with them*. The mercy, tenderness and gentleness of Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* are well known in his biography. In contrast, 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* was known for his bravery, forcefulness and sternness in the matters of truth. 'Umar frequently asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to deal with people violently for antagonizing his message, with the Prophet refusing these suggestions.

When the Apostasy Wars erupted after the death of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* each one of these two companions assumed a

stance that was at variance with his earlier nature. It was the opinion of 'Umar that they refrain from fighting the enemies of Islam during this critical period, while trying to persuade them instead. At the same time, Abu Bakr's opinion was to engage them on the battlefield, so that they would return to the fold of Islam and submit to the command of Allah *Glorified is He*. Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* said concerning them, 'I swear, if they do so much as prevent me from a single camel's leash that they used to give as part of the poor people's charity to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* I will argue their case with a sword. By Allah *Glorified is He* even if nothing remains beside the vegetation.'⁽¹⁾

These positions were articulated by Abu Bakr and 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with them* for a high purpose. If 'Umar had expressed the opinion that Abu Bakr had held during the issue, it would have been viewed as a natural result of 'Umar's sternness and boldness. However, this stern position was voiced by the possessor of a tender heart, Abu Bakr, as everyone would know that his stern actions were not being pursued simply for the sake of severity. The war was initiated for the preservation of faith and to defend its integrity. It was the crucial situation at hand that dictated *Abu Bakr's* position and demanded his firmness to surpass his natural disposition of softness.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'And lower (*ikhfid*) to them, humbly, the wings of your tenderness (*dhull*)' (*al-Isra'*: 24). Therefore, as we discussed above, the connotation of the word *dhull* is showing humility and mercy towards one's parents.

However, your own mercy will not be sufficient compensation for the favours they have done to you. Therefore, it is also your obligation to pray for the greatest Mercy of Allah *Glorified is He* to be bestowed upon them: 'And say, "O my Lord! Bestow Your grace upon them, as they cherished and reared me when I was a child,"' (*al-Isra'*: 24).

(1) *Agreed upon; Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (7284, 7285) and also by Muslim in his Sahih (20) in the Book of Faith. It is from the tradition recorded on the authority of Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him.*

The one who initiates the doing of good is not to be equated (in status) with the one who reciprocates the good action. The parents initiated the doing of good towards you and you are only reciprocating that good. For this reason, you must pray that Allah *Glorified is He* bestow His Mercy upon them. Thus, Allah will bestow sufficient Mercy to compensate the favours they have done for you.

The True Lord says:

‘Just as they cared for me when I was little’ (*al-Isra’*: 24) *Kama* (as they) implies similarity. Thus, the verse means: show them mercy like the mercy they showed me when they cherished me and reared me as a young child. *Kama* might also serve as an explicative purpose, i.e. show them mercy because they cherished and reared me as a child. This construction is similar to Allah’s saying: ‘...and remember Him as He has guided you...’ (*al-Baqara*: 198) As for the phrase ‘they cared for me’, it is a phrase which includes every educator or nurturer of the human being, even if other than the parents; for indeed, a child might be raised by other than his parents for some reason or another. A judgment is inextricably linked to its underlying basis. When the basis is present, the judgment is present and when the basis is absent, the judgment is also absent. So, if you were raised by other than your parents, those persons should enjoy the same privilege as the biological parents in terms of excellent conduct, wholesome interaction, and prayer.

This is a sign of good tidings for anyone who raises a child who is not his own. This is especially true if the child who is raised is an orphan or someone to be considered as an orphan. Within the expression: ‘they cared for me when I was little’ (*al-Isra’*: 24) is an acknowledgement on behalf of the child for the favour and beautiful conduct shown to him by his parents: a favour that should be reciprocated. Afterward, the True Lord concludes this judgment by citing an issue which ties the way a child treats his parents to the way this child treats his Lord *Glorified is He*.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

رَبُّكُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا فِي نُفُوسِكُمْ إِنَّ تَكُونُوا صَالِحِينَ فَإِنَّهُ كَانَ لِلْأَوَّابِينَ غَفُورًا ﴿٢٥﴾

**Your Lord knows best what is in your heart. If you are good,
He is most forgiving to those who return to Him [25]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 25)**

Previously, we discussed faith and hypocrisy. We said that the believer is logical with himself, because he believes with his heart as well as his tongue. The disbeliever, also, is logical with himself because he disbelieves with his heart as well as his tongue. As for the hypocrite, he is not is logical with himself because he believes with his tongue but flagrantly rejects faith within his heart. This verse necessitates that we discuss hypocrisy because it is one of the phenomena that is an adjunct to faith in Allah. We do in fact know that hypocrisy did not appear in Mecca, which had adamantly opposed Islam, stubbornly refused it and attempted to suffocate it. In contrast, it appeared in Medina which had played host to the faith; Al-Medina which, throughout all of its various parts, had opened to Islam. Some people have asked: How did this take place? We respond by stating: Hypocrisy is a salubrious occurrence when it appears beside faith; for to be sure, only that which is strong can be the object of hypocrisy. Islam was weak in Mecca. The disbelievers were boldly defying Islam, not dealing with it hypocritically. When Islam reached Medina, it began to strengthen from its root and develop at its core. As this took place, the weak-hearted began to duplicitously deal with the believers. For this reason, some ask: How could Allah speak disapprovingly about the people of Medina, and say concerning them: ‘...as are some of the people of Medina— they are obstinate in their hypocrisy...’ (*at-Tawba*: 101). We mention here, that the Quran has praised the people of Medina in terms that cannot be surpassed. Allah *Glorified is He* says in respect to them: ‘Those who were already firmly established in their homes [in Medina], and firmly rooted in faith...’ (*al-Hashr*: 9). It is as though He has made faith a place for those who dwell in it.

‘...show love for those who migrated to them for refuge and harbour no desire in their hearts for what has been given to them. They give them preference over themselves, even if they too are poor...’ (*at-Tawba*: 101). So,

if Allah says: ‘...as are some of the people of Medina— they are obstinate in their hypocrisy...’ (*at-Tawba*: 101). The presence of hypocrisy in Medina is a sign of the faith’s soundness. For indeed, if the faith was not strong, there would be no reason for the Hypocrites of Medina to deal with it in a duplicitous fashion. From this standpoint, Allah has made the hypocrites the occupiers of the lowest tier in the fire of hell. This is because the hypocrites intermingle with the believers as though they are among them and they interact with them, living with them and learning of sensitive information in the process. All the while, the believers are unable to fully encompass the hypocrites’ machinations. Hypocrites are internal enemies and it is very difficult to identify them. In this, they differ markedly from the disbelievers. The latter’s antipathy for Islam is clear, present, and articulated. This makes it possible to defend against them and take precaution.

However, why are we discussing hypocrisy in the context of our discussion around singular devotion to Allah and filial piety? The True Lord *Glorified is He* wills to give us a precise indication; that just as hypocrisy can stealthily invade our faith in Allah it can also do so to filial piety. Consequently, we observe some children who behave excellently with their parents ostentatiously to gain a reputation and not with sincerity—which amounts to hypocrisy. They are not motivated by recognizing the favour of the parents upon them, nor the parents’ protectiveness over them. It is these who are being addressed when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Your Lord knows best what is in your heart...’ (*al-Isra*: 25).

Indeed, there are some children who treat their parents with kindness, while cannily praying to be rid of them. The address was issued in the plural *rabbukum* (literally: the Lord of all of you). That is to say: the Lord of the child as well as of the parents. All of your benefit is given equal consideration with me. Just as We defend the father, We also defend the son. So that neither of you would commit anything that has dire consequences. As for His saying: ‘...If you are good...’ (*al-Isra*: 25). That is to say: if you meet the conditions of righteousness, Allah will soon grant you an assured reward. If, alternatively, you are unrighteous and insincere at heart, then return to the correct course of action at once and do not persist in this lack of righteousness. Instead, return

to Allah *Glorified is He* and repent to Him. '...He is most forgiving to those who return to Him.' (*al-Isra'*: 25); those who turn to Him again and again: are the individuals who acknowledge their sins and penitently return to Their Lord.

Previously, we clarified the legitimacy of repentance to Allah for those who engage in wrong actions. It is mercy from the Creator unto His creation. This is because if the servant committed an offence, failing to pay heed to either his religion or his conscience, and repentance were illegitimate, that single misdeed would track him. He would express grief over it his entire life. Even more, it would beckon him to another misdeed. In this manner, the entire community would suffer with the commission of a single sin! This explains why the Creator has laid down repentance: to preserve the well-being and security of the community so that it can be rich with multi-faceted good.

The Quran then expands the circle of relation from the direct family members—which are the parents—to a circle that is more encompassing. After evoking the servant's compassion toward his parents, Allah *Glorified is He* turns the servant's attention to those who are related to the parents in terms of kinship.

The True Lord says:

وَأَاتِ ذَا الْقُرْبَىٰ حَقَّهُ وَالْمِسْكِينَ وَابْنَ السَّبِيلِ وَلَا تُبَذِّرْ تَبْذِيرًا

Give relatives their due, and the needy, and travellers – do not squander your wealth wastefully [26] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 26)

The True Lord, evoking man's compassion toward his parents, He goes further to ask him to extend his compassion his parents' kinship. He says: 'Give relatives their due...' (*al-Isra'*: 26). The expression 'Their due' states that Allah has made financial support a right for relatives if they are in difficulty. If they are not in any difficulty, giving should take the form of mutual exchanges of gifts between you and them. Thus, relatives exchange gifts. The True Lord *Glorified is He* intends to spread the spirit of mutual communal responsibility among the populace.

For this reason, some of the Muslim jurists of Andalusia would order a man's hand to be severed as though he was guilty of theft if he refused to give his relatives the mandated amount of the poor-due. This is because Allah

Glorified is He did refer to it as a *haqq* (right), and whoever withholds the right of whoever is entitled to it is as though he has stolen from him. This was the course of action pursued by the Muslim jurists of Andalusia because they were living in an efflorescent society of great wealth. As a result, they exaggerated the scope of this particular legal question because no one had an excuse to neglect it.⁽¹⁾

Therefore, one of their *khulafa'a* (caliph) went to Al-Mundhir ibn Sa'id⁽²⁾ and said, 'I have betrayed an oath and I want to atone for it.' So, Al-Mundhir ibn Sa'id judged that he should fast for three days. One of the learned men who were present said, 'You have unnecessarily narrowed what is vast. Indeed, Allah has also enacted—for the atonement of betraying oaths—feeding or clothing ten indigent persons or freeing a slave. Al-Mundhir responded by saying, 'Is someone like the commander of the faithful reprimanded by feeding ten poor people or clothing them? In truth, he does that every day for a thousand or more. The only thing that will reprove him is fasting.' In this respect, they took from the spirit of the law rather than its letter; to conform to the ability of the caliph, and prove more effective at reprimanding him and deterring him from wrong action.

The word *haqq* has occurred in the Quran indicating two meanings: The first appears in Allah's words: 'Who give a due share of their wealth,' (*al-Ma'arij*: 24); in this case the *al-haqq al-ma'lum* (a due share) is the poor-due. As for the other use of the word *haqq*, it is not acknowledged or described. It is voluntary charity and making good. This means that you make a voluntary action similar to the obligatory one—like the voluntary charity

(1) This is narrated in the text *Al-Mughni* which was authored by Ibn Qudama 2: 435 in the chapter entitled the Ruling Concerning the One Who Refuses to Pay the Poor-Due: 'if he purposely refuses to pay the poor- due while acknowledging it's mandatory status, and the ruler is able to forcibly take it, he takes it by force and enacts some type of punitive measure. Most of the people of knowledge including Abu Hanifa, Malik, Ash-Shafi'i, and their companions agree that he does not take an additional amount on top of the poor-due. However, in a similar situation, if he has abundant resources and conceals them in order that the authorities will not take the poor-due from him, the authorities should take the poor-due and half of his net worth.

(2) The story of Al-Mundhir ibn Sa'id with the Andalusian Caliph who swore and wished to atone his swearing.

and the poor—due—for the sake of Allah. As Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘They will receive their Lord’s gifts because of the good they did before: sleeping only little at night, praying at dawn for Allah’s forgiveness, giving a rightful share of their wealth to the beggar and the deprived.’ (*adh-Dhariyat*: 16-19) Here, Allah did not say ‘due’ because the verse is promoting *Ihsan* (doing good deeds to the extent of excellence) which constitutes excellence and supererogatory good action. This is beyond what Allah has made an obligation upon us. The one who gives this *haqq* should feel happy, considering it an endowment rather than a burdening debt. This is because the life of this world—as we learned—is made up of fluctuations which change and alternate along with its people. So, the healthy can become infirm, the wealthy, indigent and so forth. Thus, your giving today is a guarantee for you in the future. Moreover, it is also a guarantee for your children after you. In essence, *haqq* (what is due) that you pay today is the same that you will be in need of tomorrow if you are visited by hard times. Therefore, the poor—due you give to their rightful owners today are security for you in the future. They allow you to respond to the demands of life with power: without growing spiritless or weak. You know that your due is preserved in the community. It would be the same circumstance if you left your children in neediness and poverty: The community would shoulder the burden of taking care of them. Allah *Glorified is He* speaks truthfully when He says: ‘Let those who would fear for the future of their own helpless children, if they were to die, show the same concern [for orphans]; let them be mindful of God and speak out for justice.’ (*an-Nisa'*: 9) Because of this, people of affluence and wealth—due to their *wara'* (self-restraint: keenness to refrain from that which you suspect may be a sin)—do not give to their family members out of the poor—due. Quite the reverse, they especially choose to give to indigent people who are distanced from them and they set aside money specifically designated for their relatives, with the goal of expressing good conduct through aiding them. *Al-miskin* (the needy one): He is the one who does own some things and has some money but not enough to suffice him. This is proven by the statement of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: ‘The boat belonged to some needy people who made their living from the sea...’ (*al-Kahf*: 79). He says *limasakin* (belonged to needy people). As for *al-faqir* (the indigent or needy), he is the

one who owns nothing. Some people conflate the words *al-miskin* and *al-faqir*, but this is a misunderstanding. As for the term *ibn as-sabil* (wayfarer), *sabil* refers to the road. It is quite normal for a person to be affiliated with the land of his residence; so you would say: son of Cairo or son of Port Said, for instance. If he is stranded on the road and is faced with difficult situations which place him in need of aid and assistance—even if in reality he owns massive wealth and resources—it is as though he has lost his money. It is his right to take money from the Muslims in the amount which will deliver him to his land. If the wayfarer requests help, do not ask him about the truth of his situation because he has a dutiful right to be provided with money. So, do not place him in a position of embarrassment or discomfiture.

‘...do not squander your wealth wastefully...’ (*al-Isra’*: 26): This mirrors what Allah *Glorified is He* says in a different verse: ‘...It is He who produces both trellised and un-trellised gardens, date palms, crops of diverse flavors, the olive, the pomegranate, alike yet different. So when they bear fruit, eat some of it, paying what is due on the day of harvest, but do not be wasteful: God does not like wasteful people.’ (*al-An‘am*: 141) Therefore, senseless squandering is extravagance. *Tabdhir* (squandering) is taken from the word *yabdhur* which describes the process that is undertaken by farmers when they take seedlings that they desire to harvest and spread them throughout their farming lands by hand. They excel at this process, when they spread the seeds evenly throughout the land which means that the seeds have been dispersed throughout the land that was designated for their cultivation at a ratio which gives each of the seeds an equal amount of land. In this manner, the crop succeeds and the grower is given the desired harvest. On the other hand, if they plant the seeds in a haphazard way—without a clearly defined system—the seeds will be strewn about the field in an unbalanced way. They are overflowing in one place and scant in another place. This is what we refer to as *tabdhir* (squandering) because they have placed the seeds in the wrong place. The seeds are insufficient in one place and overcrowded in another. This is an impediment to their growth. This explains why the True Lord chooses to express the act of wasteful spending through the word *tabdhir* because the extravagant person puts his money in the wrong places. He spends haphazardly, without a well-defined system. Indeed, he spends lavishly on

things which are not necessary and is niggardly when it comes to the necessities. Thus, *tabdhir* is spending money in inappropriate places or spending with neither the onset of need nor exigency.

The prohibition of squandering, as it appears here, might seem to proscribe wastefulness as it exists in relation to giving charity. By charity here is that when you give the poor-due; do not allow yourself to be taken by a faith-based temporary generosity which inspires you to give more than you are obligated. Perhaps you hear the praises of the people and their thanks and increase your giving as a result. Then afterward; after you retreat to your privacy, you might regret what you have done and blame yourself for this extravagance. Alternatively, the meaning might be: 'Give to your relatives, the needy, and wayfarer; nonetheless, do not be extravagant in other matters. Negation, here, is not for the giving. Rather, it refers to the paltry affairs for which money is unnecessarily spent.'⁽¹⁾ The True Lord then goes on to state:

إِنَّ الْمُبَذِّرِينَ كَانُوا إِخْوَانَ الشَّيْطَانِ ۖ وَكَانَ الشَّيْطَانُ لِرَبِّهِ كَفُورًا ﴿٢٧﴾

Those who squander are the brothers of Satan, and Satan is most ungrateful to his Lord [27] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 27)

Here, the word *akh* (brother) is pluralized on the form of *ikhwa* or *ikhwan*. The word *ikhwa* refers to brothers of the same patrilineal or matrilineal line. As Allah *Glorified is He* has mentioned: 'Joseph's brothers came...' (*Yusuf*: 58). It also indicates brothers in good action, *wara'* (self-restraint) and being conscious of Allah, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'The believers are brothers...' (*al-Hujurat*: 10).

(1) *Al-Qurtubi said in his Tafsir 5/3976: whoever spends his money on that which delights him in amounts that exceed what is necessary to such an extent that he depletes his resources is a prodigal spender. The person who spends his expendable cash on that which delights him and preserves his base wealth for his responsibilities is not wasteful. Whoever spends a single cent in that which is unlawful is a wasteful spender. He is forcibly deterred from spending a single cent toward that which is unlawful. On the other hand, if he wants to wastefully spend his money on delights, he is not forcibly deterred unless he is in danger of totally depleting his resources.*

The word occurs with the same connotation in Allah's statement about the Noble Lady Maryam (*peace be upon her*): 'O sister of Harun [Aaron]...' (*Maryam*: 28). Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* the brother of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* is the one intended here. Between Harun and Maryam *peace be upon them* is a very large interval of time which approaches eleven generations. Despite this, the Quran calls them siblings: they were siblings in *wara'* (self-restraint) and *taqwa* (being conscious of Allah).

As for the term *ikhwan*, it indicates that a people have gathered around a certain principle; whether it is positive or negative. At times, it is used as an indication of assemblage around good. This is exemplified in the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: '...Remember Allah's favour to you: you were enemies and then He brought your hearts together and you became brothers by His grace....' (*Al-Imran*: 103) It can also be used to refer to an assemblage around evil as understood from Allah's saying: 'Those who squander are the brothers of the devils....' (*al-Isra'*: 27) It is as if the prodigal spenders and the devils share in one characteristic and one fondness. As a result, they have been attributed with the same evil traits.

Thus, the word *ikhwa* indicates the bond shared by people of the same parentage in its basic meaning. It might also transcend to indicate brotherhood of faith, which supersedes relationships of all kinds in its ability to bind people. This gives us a suitable occasion to mention what took place during the battle of Badr between two brothers from the same family. After Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr *may Allah be pleased with him* had professed belief in Islam and migrated to Medina, he set out with the Muslim forces for Badr. At this time his brother Abu 'Aziz was still a disbeliever. So, he set out from Mecca with the army of the disbelievers. The two brothers encountered each other; one a Muslim and the other a disbeliever. It is well known that Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr *may Allah be pleased with him* was one of the wealthiest men of Mecca and that he only wore the most luxurious and finest garments. He would perfume himself with the most expensive cologne. This was known of him to such an extent that it earned him the title 'the Bon Vivant of Mecca.' Then, he accepted faith and his condition began to change. The effects of faith in Allah began to make itself manifest within all of this wealth and affluence. The

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then sent him as an emissary to Medina to teach the people the affairs of their religious lives.⁽¹⁾ Then during the battle of Uhud, Allah's Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* upon seeing him dressed in a rough sheep skin said, 'Look at what faith has done to your brother'⁽²⁾. So, what happened between the two brothers; the believer and the disbeliever? Which of the two bonds was stronger; that composed of faith in Allah or that based on blood ties? As the battle wound down Mus'ab *may Allah be pleased with him* looked and recognized that his brother had been taken as a prisoner of war by one of the Muslim soldiers named Abu Al-Yasar⁽³⁾ *may Allah be pleased with him*. He then looked at him and said, 'O Abu Al-Yasar be stern with your prisoner! Indeed his mother is rich and will pay handsomely for his ransom.' At that moment, Abu Al-Aziz⁽⁴⁾ *may Allah be pleased with him*, looked at him and said, 'O Mus'ab, is this what you advise to be done to your brother?' Mus'ab *may Allah be*

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- (1) Narrated by Abu N'aim in *Al-Hilya* 1:107: In fact, the people of Medina had sent Mu'adh ibn 'Afra' and Rafi' ibn Malik to the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to deliver the message that they desired that a man be sent before the Prophet's, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* arrival. They asked for someone who could convey Allah's Book unto the people because they acknowledged that it was the truth that should be followed. The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* dispatched Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr unto them.
 - (2) Narrated by Abu N'aim in *Al-Hilya* 1: 108: from the Hadith narrated on the authority of 'Umar ibn al Khattab *may Allah be pleased with him*: "The Prophet, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* looked at Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr *may Allah be pleased with him*, approaching him while he was clad in a ram skin that he had used to cover himself. The Prophet, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then said, 'Look at this man whose heart has been illumined by Allah. I used to see him being pampered among the notables, being given the choicest of food and drink. Only the love of Allah and His Messenger has brought him to what you see today.'"
 - (3) His name: K'ab ibn 'Umar Al-Ansari As-Salmi. He was present for the campaigns of 'Aqaba and Badr. He was the one responsible for taking Al-'Abbas captive. Mada'ni said that he was short in stature and corpulent with a protruding belly. He died in Medina in the fifty-fifth year after The Migration (*The Quran, Al-Isaba fi tamyiz As- Sahaba, Ibn Hajar Al- 'Asqalani* 7/218: Biography # 1243 in the section of Al-Kina)
 - (4) His name: Zarara ibn 'Umayr *may Allah be pleased with him*. He was a companion and received the distinction of listening to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* speak. The historians of war agree that he was taken prisoner at the battle of Badr. (*The Quran, Ibid.* 7/130)

pleased with him responded by saying, 'He is more my brother than you are.' So, the brotherhood of faith is stronger and more resilient than the brotherhood of shared parentage. Allah *Glorified is He* speaks truthfully when he says: 'The believers are brothers...' (*al-Hujurat*: 10).

Taking a closer look at His saying: 'Those who squander are the brothers of the devils...' (*al-Isra'*: 27) The True Lord *Glorified is He* has made them cohorts in one trait: squandering and wastefulness. If the squanderer goes overboard in spending his money and spends it inappropriately on unnecessary things, then Satan goes to extremes in disobedience. It is not enough for him to be a disobedient soul. On the contrary, he spreads this disobedience among others; deceiving others with it and making it seem fair. For this reason, the True Lord has described him saying: '...and Satan is most ungrateful to his Lord.' (*al-Isra'*: 27)

He is not simply a *kafir* (an infidel), rather, he is *kafir* (most ungrateful). This is a style of superlative expression within the trilateral root *k-f-r* (Arabic letters). He is described thus because he is faithless and works to make others faithless. The True Lord then goes on to say:⁽¹⁾

وَأِمَّا تُعْرِضَنَّ عَنْهُمْ بَعْثَاءَ رَحْمَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكَ تَرْجُوهَا فَقُلْ لَهُمْ قَوْلًا مَّيْسُورًا ﴿٢٨﴾

But if, while seeking some bounty that you expect from your Lord, you turn them down, then at least speak some word of comfort to them [28] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 28)

We must ask: Turning away from whom? Previously, the discussion revolved around parents, relatives, the needy, and the wayfarer. Turning away from them does not suit the context of the verse because it would constitute turning away from the obedience of Allah. This is evidenced by Allah's

(1) *The circumstance occasioning the revelation: Zayd may Allah be pleased with him mentioned that the verse was revealed about a group of people who were requesting charity from the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. The Prophet declined to grant their request because he knew that their habit was to spend their money on indecent things. So, he turned away from them because he desired to gain the reward of preventing them, of refusing to assist them in their indecency. Al-Qurtubi mentioned this explanation in his Tafsir 5: 3976.*

saying: ‘...while seeking some bounty that you expect from your Lord...’ (*al-Isra'*: 28). Obviously, Allah is in your thoughts. You are looking for Allah’s mercy, provision, and largesse to result from this ‘turning away.’ This implies that the ‘turning away’ being referenced here could not refer to disobedience or defiance. What then, is the point of mentioning this ‘turning away?’ We respond by stating: sometimes a relative, a needy person, or a wayfarer will make their way to you in order to request something of you during a time that you cannot fulfil their need. As a result, you might feel embarrassed to confront them with a negative response: you feel reticent to face that individual and reject him. What is left to do in a circumstance like this one besides to turn to your Lord *Glorified is He*, to ask with sincerity that you be given a way out; that your needs as well the need of the one who sought your favours be met. The meaning of the verse then becomes: Indeed, if you turn away from them out of embarrassment and diffidence because you are reluctant to face them while you do not have what is necessary to meet their needs, then you must retreat to your Lord in such a situation. He will show you abundant mercy; mercy that will encompass you as well as them. The statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘...then at least speak some word of comfort to them.’ (*al-Isra'*: 28) This is like what Allah has said in another place to describe a similar state of affairs: ‘A kind word and forgiveness is better than a charitable deed followed by hurtful [words]: Allah is self-sufficient, forbearing...’ (*al-Baqara*: 263). Even in the event of turning someone down, the Muslim must remain firmly committed to displaying good manners. He does not injure the feelings of the questioner. He responds carefully and with gentleness; exposing the fact that his not being able to provide the requested help is actually a source of embarrassment and awkwardness for him. In no circumstance does he project an attitude of arrogance or conceit. He must thank Allah that he was the one asked not the one asking.

All of this implies that in such situations, if one desires to use the correct expressions and act righteously, it is not enough to simply say: ‘I do not have it.’ Indeed, the one requesting the favour will accuse you of behaving snobbishly, lacking concern for him, or treating him with reticence. This is where the role of the exalted and generous standard of character which is borne out of faith

plays its part. It is this standard of character which elevates the human soul to the loftiest ranks.

Reflect upon the way in which this faith-based exalted standard of character is reflected in the statement of Allah concerning those who have legitimate excuses not to engage in armed struggle: 'And there is no blame attached to those who came to you [Prophet] for riding animals and to whom you said, "I cannot find a mount for you": they turned away with their eyes overflowing with tears of grief that they had nothing they could contribute.' (*at-Tawba*: 92)

Here is a story of some of the companions⁽¹⁾ who came to the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because they wanted to go out with him for a military campaign. They desired to place themselves in his charge and at his command. However, the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was forced to apologize to them because he did not have any mounts that they could ride upon while going to battle. What was the response of this contingent of believers as a consequence of this? Did they depart thinking: 'Let the record show, we did what was required of us', while they were secretly pleased with the outcome of this situation? No; quite the reverse. Their response was: '...they turned away with their eyes overflowing with tears of grief that they had nothing they could contribute.' (*at-Tawba*: 92) This is the way in which faith elevates its people and raises its possessors. If they are unable to perform actions that require direct engagement they offer the good word. If they are unable to do even this, there is nothing less that follows but being moved with feelings that express the true faith which causes tears to flow because of one's meagre resources. The True Lord then goes on to say:

(1) Muhammad ibn K'ab Al-Qurazi has mentioned: These Companions were Salim ibn 'Auf, Harmi ibn 'Amr, 'Abd Ar-Rahman ibn K'ab Abu Layla, Fadlullah of the Al-M'ala tribe, 'Amr ibn 'Atama, and 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr Al-Muzani may Allah be pleased with him. They came to the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so that he could supply them with gear and arms in order to prepare them go out in Allah's path. His response to them was as follows: '...I cannot find anything whereupon to mount you...' (*at-Tawba*: 92) Allah had sent down their excuse in His book with His words: '[But] no blame shall attach to the weak, nor to the sick, nor to those who have no means [to equip themselves], provided that they are sincere towards Allah and His Apostle: there is no cause to reproach the doers of good, for Allah is much-forgiving and a dispenser of mercy' (*at-Tawba*: 91).

وَلَا تَجْعَلْ يَدَكَ مَغْلُولَةً إِلَىٰ عُنُقِكَ وَلَا تَبْسُطْهَا كُلَّ الْبَسْطِ فَتَقْعُدَ مَلُومًا مَّحْسُورًا ﴿٢٩﴾

**Do not be tight-fisted, nor so open-handed that you
end up blamed and overwhelmed with regret [29]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 29)**

In a previous verse, the True Lord discusses the squanderers and warned us not to assume this trait. In this verse the True Lord establishes the economic balance that enables the human being to carry out life's transactions in a wholesome manner. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And do not make your hand to be shackled to your neck...' (*al-Isra'*: 29). The word *yad* (hand) is usually used to express donating and granting. We say, for instance: 'so and so has a hand in with me' or 'he has countless hands in...' This last expression means that his favours have been plentiful. This is because donating or granting, most of the time, is given with the hand. So, Allah says: 'do not allow your *yad* (hand)—which is used for giving—to remain shackled—that is to say—fastened to your neck. When you fasten the hand to the neck you are unable to spend. Hence, its usage here suggests that it is a metonymical reference to miserliness and stinginess. The counter picture offers: '...nor stretch it forth to the utmost (limit) of its stretching forth...' (*al-Isra'*: 29). The prohibition of stretching the hand to the utmost limit as it appears here implies that 'stretching the hand' somewhat is permissible. Spending on the necessities and the absolute requirements is representative of 'somewhat stretching the hand.' 'Stretching the hand' is a metonymical reference to giving and expenditure.

In this manner, this meaning coincides with all of the definitions mentioned earlier for the words *badhdhara* and *badhra*. As for *badhdhara*, it describes the process of taking a handful of seeds and releasing them from the hand all at once. After this, the vegetation which grows from these seeds will be heaped about, some of it eating from other parts of it. This is the *tabdhir* that has been proscribed. In terms of the other type, it occurs when the experienced planter—who is familiar with this method of seeding—takes a handful of seeds and clasps them a little bit; he clasps them with the amount of pressure that allows him to release the seeds gradually; one after the other

upon plots of land that are of similar dimensions. This method is referred to as *badhra*. This is symbolic of the just balance which the Wise Lawgiver desires that we observe. This is moderation. Hence, both of its extremes are reprehensible. This meaning has also occurred within the statement of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: 'They are those who are neither wasteful nor niggardly when they spend, but keep to a just balance.' (*al-Furqan*: 67)

This is a reference to moderation and balance. Thus, do not extend your hand to its fullest extent by spending all that you own. However, extend it somewhat which means that something of your savings will remain with you. This bit of your savings should enable you to raise your standard of living.

Beforehand, we clarified the wisdom that underlies moderation in spending. We said: it is undeniable that balanced spending enriches life's transactions contributes to its growth and promotes its enhancement. This is different from tightfistedness and miserliness; indeed, they cripple life's movement and give rise to inactivity, unemployment, and idleness economic depression in the markets, which negatively affects life and hinders its development.

Therefore, the circulation of currency is absolutely necessary so that you can participate in turning the wheels of life. Also, there must be moderation in spending with the aim of saving something of your earnings. This is the money that will enable you to develop your way of life and raise your living standard in the material world.

Speaking of the wasteful extravagant spender *mubadhdhir*, you will find him socially immobile. He does not advance in life by a single step. How can he make such advances while he neglects to save anything? With this sensible instruction; divine in its origin, we are able to secure the smooth progress of life and revive societal and individual enhancement. Here, we are given the natural consequences of extravagance and prodigal spending: '...lest you should (afterwards) sit down blamed, overwhelmed with regret.' (*al-Isra*': 29)

Earlier, we shed light on the fact that the posture of *Qu'ud* (Sitting down) in the Quran indicates a lack of ability to stand up and confront the challenges of life. This is an appropriate way to describe the person given to extravagance, in as much as nothing returns to him from what he spends. The expression

'sitting down' serves the purpose of revealing the deceleration of life's development; for moving in life depends on standing to face its trials and taking action therein. This explains why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Those believers who stay at home, apart from those with incapacity are not equal to those who commit themselves and their possessions to striving in Allah's way...' (*an-Nisa'*: 95).

Maluman '...Blamed...' (*al-Isra'*: 29) indicates that he has done something for which he was blamed and reprehended. The first people to upbraid a wasteful spender are his children and family. The same applies for the niggardly miser. Both of these are held accountable for their imbalanced spending.


Mahsuran '...overwhelmed with regret...' (*al-Isra'*: 29) indicates the feeling of regret at that which has become your lot in terms of poverty and neediness. An alternative understanding of the expression offers: It is from their saying, 'an overwhelmed camel' which is a camel that is incapable of standing with its cargo. In identical fashion, the extravagant wasteful spender is neither capable of improving his life nor undertaking its responsibilities. Moreover, he is completely devoid of the potential to realize the opportunity the future contains for him as well as his children. To put it concisely, if you are excessively tight fisted, this is reprehensible and if you are excessive in your spending you will be forced to 'sit' restricted from accessing life's potential because you are unable to actualize it.

In essence, both extremes are blameworthy. They both entail vice and neither of them leads to endings that will leave the community or the individual pleased. Therefore, what is the objective of this lesson? The objective of this lesson is for the human being to traverse life's path, established between excessiveness and self-deprivation. This is like Allah's statement: 'They are those who are neither wasteful nor niggardly when they spend, but keep to a just balance.' (*al-Furqan*: 67)

The Quran provides us with a conclusive, balanced constitution which allows for economic development in the community. Its bottom line reads: Extend your hand in spending so that you can participate in the community's progress and market activity. However, don not extend your hand to the utmost. Preserve something of your income so that you can move to realize

your aspirations in life. Moreover, do not be tight-fisted and niggardly to yourself and your family for this will make them reproach you and detest being with you. In fact, this will make you an inert member of your community: you do not interact with it or enrich its life.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* the possessor of infinite stores of all that is beneficial says: 'What you have runs out but what Allah has endures...' (*an-Nahl*: 96). If the True Lord gave every member of His creation all that they desired it would not decrease His dominion in the least. As He says in the Qudsi Hadith: 'O My servants, even if the first amongst you and the last amongst you, your living and your dead, your present and your absent; the humans among you and the Jinn all gathered in one plain ground and each of them were to ask for all that he wishes for, that would only detract from My dominion as much as if one of you were to pass by the edge of the sea and dip a needle in it and withdraw it. That is because I am the Most Generous, Majestic. My conferral is indescribable and My punishment is indescribable. I give with a word; when I will something, all I do is say to it "Be!" and it is.'⁽¹⁾ The True Lord then goes on to say:


 إِنَّ رَبَّكَ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ إِنَّهُ كَانَ بِعِبَادِهِ خَبِيرًا بَصِيرًا

Your Lord gives abundantly to who- ever He will, and sparingly to whoever He will: He knows and observes His servants thoroughly [30] (The Quran, *al-Isra*': 30)

Allah is the One whose stores do not expire. He gives His creation in exact measure. He does not extend their provision without restriction nor does He unconditionally restrict it. On the contrary, He extends it unto a people and restricts it from others in order to further life's development. This is due to the fact that if Allah were to extend and enlarge the provision of all people, they would be freed of their need for each other. This would consequently sever the ties that bind them, and thus ruin their collective life.

(1) Narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his *Sunnan* 2495 from the Hadith of Abu Dharr peace be upon him. He said concerning this Hadith: it is a solid narration. It was also narrated by Imam Ahmad in his *Musnad* 153 5: 77 Ibn Majah also narrated it in his *Sunnan* 4257.

The developmental structure of life necessitates that someone who owns capital needs labour and the one in possession of labour needs capital. The varying needs of people coincide and converge. This is the way in which people complete each other. Every member of the community is able to sense his importance and the significance of his function in life.

Beforehand, we mentioned that the True Lord has not created any single human who has all kinds of talents. On the contrary, the talents are widely dispersed among the whole of creation. You are the possessor of a specific talent in a particular field while the talent that I possess may relate to a different field. The aim of all of this is that people remain in need of each other. Therefore, Allah places the wealthy individual who might—if the circumstances were different—exult in his wealth and use it to project an attitude of superiority above others, in need of something that is simple, but something that he would nonetheless detest performing himself. In such a situation, it is absolutely imperative that he acquire that object or service so that he can pursue life's development with diligence. It is not the objective of the True Lord that some people confer a benefit upon others. Rather, the mutual benefit of all of humanity is inextricably linked to their incessant need of one another.

So, if the True Lord *Glorified is He* neither extends the provisions of His servants to them in an unrestricted manner nor unconditionally restricts their provisions, but instead, extends and restricts simultaneously, His tremendous wisdom must lie behind this process. This explains the reason why he has chosen moderation as the Way for His servants: To give arrangement to their lives. The servant must be pleased with that which has been designated for him in both situations, and traverse the developmental path of life at a pace that is in concert with the provision that Allah has given him. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...But let him whose provision is restricted spend according to what Allah has given him...' (*at-Talaq*: 7).

Whoever is given constricted means is directed to spend in accordance with his ability. He is not given the command to spend over his head and to venture outside of his means. This economic theory assures humanity some measure of comfort as well as integrity within the life of this world. Allah has mercy on the person who is well aware of his standing. For indeed, people

observe a source of exhaustion in this life and a cause of unhappiness, when they see an indigent person with constricted means attempting to live as a rich person, who has been given abundant provision. He is venturing outside his means into that which Allah has favoured others above him.

For instance, imagine two colleagues working in the same field being paid the same salary. The first is from a wealthy background and enjoys a comfortable lifestyle made possible in part due to the money he receives from his father in addition to his salary. The second is from an underprivileged background and might be forced to spend part of his salary assisting his father with the duties of the family. If they enter the store in order to purchase something, the person from the underprivileged background should not focus on his profession salary. Rather, he should direct his attention to his real wealth profile and social position, and purchase accordingly. He should not desire to emulate his colleague because each of them has a certain potential and boundary that should not be exceeded.

This is a combination of precise economic theory and balanced conduct that is rooted in faith. For this reason, the person who respects the judgment of Allah and is pleased with what Allah has apportioned for him; living inside those parameters without attempting to transgress them, is told by the True Lord: 'Because you have been pleased with what I have apportioned for you, I will raise the measure of your provision to the level of your consideration for Me.' Then, He will make his provision bounteous after it had been constricted.

This is something we observe in life, its examples are sufficiently clear. How many people have been impoverished and in straightened circumstances only to end up experiencing a change of fortune and a raise in living standard which lands them in affluence and comfort, only after they expressed satisfaction at what Allah had decreed for them.

The True Lord extends the provision of whomever he chooses and strains His provision of whomever he chooses. This is because Allah always desires to place people in the earth as his vicegerent and to have them always remember this reality, for if they forget they begin to believe that they are inherent in this world.

What a gross mistake for the human being to forget that he is the vicegerent of Allah on earth, and traverses life as though he is inherent in this world. By no means, you are nothing more than a vicegerent of the One who appointed you, and you depend on what the Provider provided you with. By no means should you be deluded nor should you attempt to live at a standard that exceeds that which Allah has apportioned for you.

If you consider yourself inherent in this world, the whole of the created order will be thrown into misguidance. To be certain, Allah has made the world a collection of vicissitudes. Which means that the individual who is being abundantly provided for today can be in for scant measure tomorrow; while the person whose resources are meagre today can be amply provided for tomorrow. This is one of the ways of Allah which He effectuates in His creation; its purpose is suppressing the human being's proclivity toward the delusional idea that he is independent of Allah.

If Allah granted the human being a perpetual state of opulence, creation would cease to enjoy the pleasure of paying to Allah: 'O my Lord! Grant me provision with abundance!' If He granted the human being an unending state of good health, creation would discontinue enjoying the pleasure of paying to Allah: 'O my Lord! Heal me!' This is why the human being remains tied to his Benefactor; in constant need of Him and calling upon Him. Allah *Glorified is He* has says: 'But man exceeds all bounds when he thinks he is self-sufficient...' (*al-'Alaq*: 6-7).

It is need that connects the human being to his Lord. It makes him inseparably bound to Him. Therefore, extension and restriction of provision are from Allah *Glorified is He* and each contains wisdom. He does not unrestrictedly extend the provision of His slaves by giving them everything they want, nor does He unconditionally restrict their provision by barring them from enjoying comfort and giving them only what they detest. On the contrary, He gives with a well-determined measure so that progress within life can come to fore, as He *Glorified is He* has said in another verse:

'If Allah were to grant His plentiful provision to [all] His creatures, they would act insolently on earth, but He sends down in due measure whatever He will...' (*ash-Shura*: 27). Also, the statement of Allah: '...He knows and

observes His servants thoroughly' (*al-Isra'*: 30) for if the True Lord had neglected to distribute wealth in this way with wisdom, the balance of the world would be disrupted. The one amply provided for would have declared himself independent of all others in that which his provision allowed, while the one managing constricted means would have rebelled against all of creation; jealous and envious of others, he would have been a constant source of animosity.

Only when everyone knows that everything is being given according to Allah's determination and wisdom, will the entire created order remain bound to its Creator. Allah's saying: 'Your Lord...' (*al-Isra'*: 30) contains an interesting point: It means that you, Muhammad are the most dignified of Allah's creatures. Nevertheless, you have been given provision so abundant that you were able to give charity like someone who did not fear impoverishment, and you have experienced provision so restricted that you were forced to fasten a stone to your stomach to stave off hunger.⁽¹⁾

If this is what the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* experienced, no one should find it unreasonable that Allah would restrict his provision. Who amongst us has fastened a stone to his stomach to stave off hunger?

After the True Lord speaks to us about wealth—a legitimate branch of life—and illustrates a way of dealing with it that facilitates the development of life, and enables people to traverse life's path in a manner that ensures decency and happiness—the way that assures that they will be able to attain their aspirations and elevate their living standard—He now turns to the topic of life in its most direct sense. Allah has ordered that we preserve our lineage and He has prohibited us from destroying it.

Indeed, He *Glorified is He* has said:

(1) *This was a practice of some of the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him like Abu Hurayra. Al-Bukhari 6452 and Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri Musnad Ahmad 3/44*

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ خَشْيَةَ إِمْلَاقٍ مِّنْ نَّزْعِهِمْ وَإِيَّاكُمْ إِنَّ فَتْلَهُمْ كَانَ خِطَاً كَبِيراً ﴿٣١﴾

Do not kill your children for fear of poverty — We shall provide for them and for you — killing them is a great sin [31]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 31)

The nexus between this verse and that which precedes it is clear. Indeed, the topic of discussion is still provision. The Creator is issuing us a warning: By no means should you consider the distribution of provision as being under your control; for to be sure, you were not responsible for your own creation nor did you create your children or descendants.

Quite the reverse, the Creator, is the only One responsible for you and your descendant's creation. Moreover, He is the One Who summoned them forth into existence and in the same manner summoned you. This has not changed, He remains the Creator just as He remains the One who summons into existence and ensures the provision of all of His creatures. As a result, be sure not to move beyond your sphere of influence by sticking your nose into this matter. This is especially true if the matter concerns children. Observe Allah's statement: 'Do not kill your children' (*al-Isra'*: 31).

The word *qatl* (killling) means to annihilate a life. This is similar to death but among the two there is a marked difference that should be highlighted: As for *al-qatl* (killing): it is the annihilation of life in a manner that involves destroying the human body. The human being is composed of a body which the Creator *Glorified is He* has constructed—as the house for his soul. It consists of the organs of the human body. The Creator then placed a soul within the body, and it is thus given life. If one person strikes another on the head for instance, the brain is damaged and his life ends. Nonetheless, his life ends with the destruction of the exoskeleton which houses the lively soul. To be sure, the soul only dwells in a body which has certain characteristics. When these characteristics undergo some type of change, the soul leaves the body.

On the other hand, *al-mawt* (death) begins at the onset of the soul's separation from the body. The body begins to decompose after that; the various members of his body subsequently rot. In the final analysis, death is completed, while the exoskeleton is in a state of soundness. This bears a

striking resemblance to an electrical lamp that will not light. It can only light if it contains certain characteristics such as: a source which generates the electricity, a wire which connects it to the source and a light bulb. If this light bulb is shattered, it emits light. Why? It releases light because you have destroyed something that is essential to the process of illumination. In the same manner, if someone uses a bullet to inflict a mortal wound to the heart of someone else, indeed, he dies and his soul is released from the body. This is because you have destroyed an essential element of the human constitution, without which, the human soul is no longer able to inhabit the body. For this reason, the Divine law does not prescribe any punishment for dying, i.e., a natural death which begins with the departure of the soul from the body. There is, however, a prescribed punishment for murder. Additionally, the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has said: 'Accursed is the one who destroys the physical form that Allah created.'

Indeed, the life that a body encloses is a structure that has been moulded by the Creator *Glorified is He*. As such, it is the property of its Creator, and it is not allowable for anyone to destroy it; even its temporary owner. If this was not the case, how would you explain the Islamic prohibition of suicide and treatment of it as a mark of gross infidelity and disbelief in Allah?! At a fundamental level, killing is being explicitly prohibited in the verse because it is ending a life caused by humans' work not by death. This is different from death which is not intended in the verse. The Quran clarifies this issue with Allah's words: 'Muhammad is only a messenger before whom many messengers have been and gone. If he died or was killed, would you revert to your old ways?' (*Al-Imran*: 144)

Clearly, we can see that murder is not death. Murder is an act of transgression on the physical constitution of another person and the subsequent destruction of that constitution. Allah says: '...your children....' (*al-Isra*: 31) Although the term *al-awlad* (children) encompasses males as well as females, the well-known findings of historical research reveal them to have practiced only female infanticide, not male. The Quran records: 'When the baby girl buried alive is asked for what sin she was killed' (*at-Takwir*: 8-9).

If truth be told, during those times, they would consider male children sources of aid and support in facing life's difficulties as well as in their wars

against each other. Moreover, they viewed males as sources of good ancestry and the elongation of lineage. Conversely, they viewed females as unmixed sources of shame, especially in the shadow of poverty, neediness, and destitution, for perhaps a wealthy person might attempt to lure her into something which could compromise her honour. With this understanding, the matter was still interpreted to be a matter of provision. Allah's saying: '...for fear of poverty...' (*al-Isra'*: 31) should be taken to mean: out of fear of poverty. The word *imlaq* (poverty) is derived from the words *malaq* (to adulate) and *tamallaq* (flattering), both of which connote neediness. Indeed, a person does not voluntarily flatter another; quite the opposite, the flatterer is usually in need of something that the second party has. Thus, he flatters him with the aim of acquiring his need.⁽¹⁾

Turning our attention to Allah's statement: '...We shall provide for them and for you...' (*al-Isra'*: 31), we find that it has a point that we should consider attentively, in order to effectively respond to the enemies of the Quran—those who accuse the Quran of containing contradictions.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions here: '...for fear of poverty...' (*al-Isra'*: 31). This is stated to the effect of 'fearing poverty'. This means that poverty has not set in yet. It is a looming possibility in the unfolding days ahead. Currently, the provision is present and gaining access to it has been facilitated. Hence, the one who takes the life of his children, in such a situation, is not preoccupied with his own provision. Rather, he is concerned with the future provision of his children. This explains why the arrangement of the verse occurs as follows: 'We shall provide for them' (*al-Isra'*: 31).

First of all, when the infant is born, his apportioned provision comes into existence with him. As such, do not be preoccupied with this issue: It is

(1) *From among the meanings that have been mentioned for malaq is an increase in affection, invitation, and humility above and beyond the proper expression of those characteristics. The sycophant rajul malaq gives with his tongue that which is not in his heart. The Prophetic Hadith expresses this in the words, 'Cajoling is not from the characteristics of a believer.' (The Quran, Lissan Al-'Urab) under the heading م ل ق Muttaqi Al-Hindi has recorded it in a work entitled Kinz al - 'umal 28937 from the Hadith narrated on the authority of Anas ibn Malik, which he ascribed to ibn 'Adi in Al-Kamil and Bayhaqi in ash-Shu'ab on the authority of Mu'adh. See Al-Firdaws in Ma'thur Al-Khattab 5158.*

completely removed from your sphere of influence. Only after making the previous assertion does Allah say: 'and for you' (*al-Isra'*: 31). This implies that the provision of the children is given precedence over your own provision. Perhaps this can be understood as such: 'Do not kill your children out of fear of impoverishment. Indeed, We are providing for you through them and on their account.' It is incumbent upon us that we direct additional attention to this issue because the enemies of the faith—those who plough through the Quran seeking a fault—have imagined contradiction or redundancy between the verse we are discussing: 'Do not kill your children for fear of poverty. We shall provide for them and for you...' (*al-Isra'*: 31) and another verse which reads: '...do not kill your children from poverty. We will provide for you and for them.' (*al-An'am*: 151) We respond to these by stating: you have approached the Quran without the level of mastery of the Arabic language that is necessary to understand it properly. The Quranic style is not marked by rigidity. On the contrary, its most salient feature is its eloquence. Understanding this feature and reflecting upon it requires a depth of linguistic feeling and perception.

If you approach the words of Allah in the correct manner, you will not find it to contain any discrepancy or redundancy. The first manner in which the verse is worded is not more highly articulated than the second is, nor is the second more eloquent than the first is. Absolutely not, rather, each verse is well expressed. For indeed, even if the two verses appear identical at first glance, there is a great difference between the meanings of each.

The verse of the chapter of *al-Isra'* reads: 'We shall provide for them and for you' (*al-Isra'*: 31). We have already clarified the wisdom underlying this arrangement: provide sustenance for them as well as you. As for the verse in the chapter of *al-An'am*, it reads: '...do not kill your children from poverty. We will provide for you and for them.' (*al-An'am*: 151) Certainly, we must recognize that the verse contains an outset and a rearmost. To understand one without understanding the other, will lead to an unsound conclusion. Even more, it is absolutely essential that any real attempt to understand the verse join between its outset and a rearmost. If this is achieved, the true import of the verse will become apparent, and you will be removed from any further reservations about the meaning of this verse. In reference to this group of

critics, they probed the rearmost of the two verses without looking at the outset. If the verses contained the same outset, there might be some validity to their conclusions. However, there is a marked contrast between the outset of the two verses: '...for fear of poverty...' (*al-Isra'*: 31), while the second '...from poverty...' (*al-An'am*: 151).

The difference contained within the two expressions is obvious. In the first case, the poverty is not present yet. In actual fact, fear of something is evidence that its object has yet to materialize; its occurrence, however, is anticipated in the future. Furthermore, the one who holds this fear is not preoccupied with his own provision. Rather, he is preoccupied with the provision—or feared lack thereof—that will be available for his children. As for the second expression: '...from poverty...' (*al-An'am*: 151) the impoverishment is present and has actually become visible. In this situation, a person is preoccupied with his own lack of resources not an expected shortage of resources in the future. In such a situation, it is fitting that the fathers be accorded the first mention when discussing provision, i.e. before that of the children. As long as the outset of each verse differs, the rearmost must follow suit. So where is the contradiction?

There is another suggestion in the verse. The address contained within the prohibition is directed toward a group: 'do not kill your children.' (*al-Isra'*: 31) The active participle is plural and the object of the verbal clause within the statement is plural as well. Earlier, we mentioned that if a plural active participle is addressed to a plural object, the meaning becomes individualized. This would make the meaning: Not any single one from among you should kill his children. This is no different from how a teacher would tell the students: 'Take out your books.' He intends that each individual student should remove his book.

If someone avers that the verse is only prohibiting each individual father from killing his son out of fear of poverty, yet, it does not prohibit a father from killing someone else's child, as a favour, and that someone killing a third one's child, we respond by stating: This is incorrect. The meaning of the verse is that all parents should not kill any children. This implies that the meaning encompasses my children as well as the children of others. This is

the intended meaning when a plural active participle is addressed to a plural object. If we were, for instance, to say: it is permissible for you to make me a favour and kill my child, and for me to kill your child as a favour for you; this could not stand to reason because it neglects the grammatical principle that states: if a plural active participle is addressed to a plural object, the meaning becomes individualized.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes this verse by saying: '...killing them is a great sin.' (*al-Isra*': 31) *Khit'a* is like *khata'a* refers to a sin or great misdeed. It appears with two vowel markings both *kasra* and *fat'ha* in the same manner as when the verse reads '*khudhu hidhrrakum*' 'take your precaution' (*an-Nisa*': 71) or '*khudhu hadharakum*'; can appear with alternate vowel markings. As for the term *Khit'a* (sin), the letters *kh*, *t* and *a* (hamzah) indicate a lack of conformity with that which is correct. Nonetheless, on the first occasion, your lack of conformity with the correct course of action might be attributed to the fact that you do not know what is correct. However, on the second occasion, if you are out of step with the correct course of action it is because you transgressed its limits after knowing them.

The teacher, when he corrects the mistakes of the students during the school year, he first clarifies where they have erred. Afterward, he proceeds to correct these mistakes. However, he does not do this until he has apprised his student of the principle that he is proceeding upon; the principle that the student overlooked and consequently fell into error. During this time, there is nothing objectionable about our correcting and instructing him. Indeed, he is still within the period of being educated; the phase of his being cultivated and trained.

Conversely, if these questions occur on the final exams, the matter changes altogether. The teacher will point out the mistakes of the student but he will not correct them. Rather, he will configure the grades of the student in accordance with what he deserves. In the end, the matter will ultimately be one of success—for those who arrived at the correct response—or failure—for those who answered erroneously. This is because by the end of the year the student has become aware of all the rules which he should abide by. This is a result of the fact that at the year's end the teacher has assumed binding regulations that he must adhere to. *Khit'a*, or *khata'a* are derived from *khata*,

out of which we get the verb (to take a stride) and the word *khatwah* (footstep)⁽¹⁾. Both of these meanings connote repositioning through movement. It is as though the correct course of action is established, well rooted and has become well known among people; but you, after this, transgress it and reposition yourself elsewhere. This repositioning is representative of the *Khit'a* (mistake); a footstep, which leads you into transgression.

Likewise, Allah *the Most High* says: 'Follow not the footsteps of Satan' (*al-Baqara*: 168). Such steps gradually divert you from the fundamental principles of the *Shari'a*. The clear and unchanging fact is that Allah is the Creator of humankind, and He has honoured them by making them vicegerents over the earth, succeeding each other in constructing and improving life in the world and establishing the Way of the Creator *the Most High* on earth. So how can the ones who have been honoured by being made the Creator's successive vicegerents cut off this succession by murdering their children, who are the seeds of the future generations? Even if we take the opinion of those who hold that the word '*awladukum*' strictly refers to daughters—that is, slaying the daughters and sparing sons—what will be the case when the young men grow up and want to marry? How can the succession of the human race continue with only males? But this understanding does not conform to the verse because the verse strictly prohibits infanticide, males, and females alike. The Lord *the Most High* describes the offense as being 'grave': 'a grave offense' (*al-Isra'*: 31). Actually, it is a gross sin with many bad consequences.

First: This crime destroys something which Allah created. No one can destroy something which Allah created but Allah Himself.

Second: It severs the continuity of human life and undermines the successive vicegerency, which Allah planned, over the earth.

Third: It is a flagrant violation of a person's natural feelings of kindness and affection. Indeed, a child is a part of his father. Killing his child deprives

(1) The verbs *khata'* and *akhta'* are verbs with sound ending as opposed to weak endings which end in the Arabic character Hamza As for the verb *Khata* it is a verb with a weak ending which ends in the Arabic character Alif—which in this case has been transformed from the Arabic character Waw. This explains why the present tense form of the first occurs as *yukhti'*, while the present tense of the latter occurs as *yakhtu*

a person of all the feelings of fatherhood and love and mercy, and even the quality of being humane itself. As such, the Lord *the Most High* has given us guidelines to preserve the human lineage and the continuous succession of human vicegerency, as divinely planned, over the earth, as Allah prohibits fathers from murdering their children. The Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَلَا تَقْرَبُوا الزِّنَىٰ إِنَّهُ كَانَ فَحِشَةً وَسَاءَ سَبِيلًا ﴿٣٢﴾

**And do not go anywhere near adultery: it is an outrage,
and an evil path [32] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 32)**

After concluding the discussion of how to preserve human lineage and maintain successive human vicegerency over the earth, the Lord *the Most High* wants to protect humankind from loss and provide him with guidelines to live a life of decency. When we have a new baby, son, or daughter, we are very happy and so pleased with the newborn child that we prefer them to ourselves with regards to food and other needs. We strive to carve out a life of ease and a delightful and promising future for them. The poet coined this meaning when he said,

Like our own livers, our children move about the earth

If winds blow furiously on them, not a wink of rest can we maintain

Nonetheless, this familial support system that the Lord *the Most High* has made the bedrock of family life is completely razed when any amount of doubt creeps into the hearts of the fathers about the paternity of their children. In such a case their life turns into an overwhelming inferno boiling with unrelenting internal conflict, about which no one can endure or speak. It is a stab at the deepest part of one's own psyche. This explains why the Lord *the Most High* strongly prohibits us from this vile crime. He aims to preserve the pure lineages of men and women. In such a case, every father can attain a peace of mind about the pure lineage of his children. As such, one will express affection and provide parental care for his children bearing the burdens and agonies of life for their sake.

Allah *the Most High* says: 'And do not approach fornication' (*al-Isra'*: 32). The one who attentively surveys the Quranic verses finds that the Lord *the Most High* concludes His Commandments saying: 'These are the bounds set by

Allah; do not, then, transgress them' (*al-Baqara*: 229). This verse comes in the context of the legal rulings on divorce. The Lord *the Most High* has laid down rules for divorce and orders us to abide by these rules without transgressing them. Allah *the Most High* tells us the rules and forbids us from overstepping them. As for prohibitions, Allah *the Most High* concludes them by saying: 'These are bounds set by Allah: do not, then, approach them' (*al-Baqara*: 187). The prohibition in question is related to the ruling of approaching women during the devotional retreat. The Lord *the Most High* wants us to restrain from approaching this limit, to keep a protective distance from it. This precaution is mandatory to keep at a distance from evils. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said, 'Whoever approaches the border of a sanctuary is in danger of encroaching its boundary'.⁽¹⁾

As the Creator of human beings, He is most knowledgeable about those things that they should not approach. To put it simply, some forbidden matters may be so tempting and attractive that they seduce man to fall into sins, and this is why man should not even approach such evils. Evidently, there is a difference between committing an offense and approaching it. What is forbidden is to actually commit it, why did Allah then prohibit approaching it? In reply to this I say, 'Allah intends to protect your emotions concerning this particular issue—sexual instinct, which is the strongest of human instincts. In other words, if you come close to its allowable limits, you may very well fall inside its prohibited boundaries. Keeping a distance from illicit sex is safer for a person'. The scholars have classified 'the aspects of feeling and knowledge' into three stages: Perception, sentiment and drive. If you are, for instance, strolling in a garden and you spot a beautiful rose, the moment you fix your gaze upon it is called 'perception'; it is when your sense of sight perceives its presence. Fittingly, nothing prevents you from looking upon it and enjoying its beauty. Having become impressed and pleased by it, the love

(1) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'He who falls into doubtful things falls into that which is unlawful, just as a shepherd who grazes his cattle in the vicinity of a pasture declared prohibited (by the king); he is likely to stray into the pasture. [Oh people] Beware, every king has a protected pasture or limits, and Allah's limits are that which He has declared unlawful'. *Al-Bukhari*, (2051); *Muslim*, (1599) on the authority of *An-Nu'man ibn Bashir*.

of this flower roots itself in your heart, which is called 'sentiment'. This describes the inner sensation aroused by your observation. As you extend your hand to pluck it, this represents the 'drive' stage, when action takes place. Here, the Divine Law endeavours to prevent you from false actions. It prohibits neither perception nor sentiment in normal circumstances.

However, this issue of sexual instinct is exceptional; it is difficult to separate drive from sentiment and sentiment from perception with regards to the sexual instinct. It is an amalgam of interconnected phases in a way that humanity is not able to separate them. When a man sees a beautiful woman, a strong impression and inclination towards her are aroused in him. Next, he loves her, which urges him to approach her. This is the point when he both obeys the drive of his instincts and falls into what is unlawful, or suppresses it and suffers the bitterness of abstention. The Lord *the Most High* is most knowledgeable about human nature. He knows what revolves around and pervades people's inner thoughts: their deepest feelings and emotions. This is why He not only prohibits illicit sex, but He also forbids all means that lead to it, even the glance. Allah says: 'Tell the believing men to lower their gaze' (*an-Nur*: 30).

Put it simply: if your perceptive faculties are allowed to work loosely, the emotions will be excited. Once they are excited, drive will take over. If you allow your response—after the sight of attractive beauties—to be determined by your 'drive', much corruption will take place. Nevertheless, if you suppress your emotions after the entire process of perception, being emotionally excited and sensing the drive, you will suffer from the heartbreak of feeling, an intense passion you cannot satisfy. No patience will help you bear it. Therefore, it is safer for you and for the entire community, and it also preserves your honour and protects you from sinning, to lower your gaze and stop looking at others. If you follow this order, you will then honour people and bring comfort to your soul as well. But unfortunately many people overlook this fact. Men and women are doing nothing short of deceiving themselves by being in private settings with foreign members of the opposite sex. If questioned, each claims innocence and good intentions. They view relationships fostered by work, school, family relationships, or the neighbourhood a pretext for mixture and intimacy. Actually, it is nothing but delusion. Undoubtedly, the Creator is

more aware of people and their weaknesses. Allah only commands us to lower our gaze to escape tremendous dangers and evils to the gazers and also the entire community. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The glance is a drawn arrow from the quiver of Satan. Whoever leaves it out of fear of Allah will instead taste the sweetness of faith in his heart'.⁽¹⁾ Considering the above, we can understand Allah's objective when He says: 'And do not approach fornication' (*al-Isra'*: 32).

He did not say, 'Do not commit illicit sexual intercourse', for this crime is the last stage that follows a number of steps that lead up to it. Hence, beware of allowing yourself to approach it. Indeed, one who comes near to the borders of a prohibited territory will most likely fall into it. Keep away from those who call for liberal sexual behaviour and the free mixing of sexes. Falsehood remains false regardless of the prevalence and the multitude of its followers; it will never become the truth. Be wary of the widespread justifications that people offer, e.g., 'she is his paternal cousin', 'he is her maternal cousin,' or 'they were raised in the same house'. Beware of all hapless justifications that do not change anything which is unlawful to be lawful. The bottom line is as long as the lady is lawful for you to marry; it is not lawful for you to be in seclusion with her. Prophet Muhammad's statement clearly states, 'No man is alone with a woman but Satan is their third'.⁽²⁾ Gazing at women and being alone with them are not evils in themselves, but they are wrong because of the bad consequences to which they lead. As such, Allah's saying: 'Do not approach fornication' (*al-Isra'*: 32) is a more compelling way to pronounce its unlawfulness and also safer and more protective for individuals and the community than simply saying, 'Do not commit illicit sexual intercourse'.

(1) *Al-Hakim, Al-Mustadrak*, 4: 314; on the authority of Hudhayfa may Allah be pleased with him. *Al-Hakim* said about it, 'Its chain of transmission is authentic but both *Al-Bukhari* and *Muslim* have not narrated it'. *Ad-Dhahabi*, in *At-Talkhees*, remarked that 'Ishaq is very weak and 'Abd Ar-Rahman Al-Wasiti (from Wasit) has been deemed as weak by critics of Hadith.'

(2) *Al-Hakim, Al-Mustadrak*, 1: 113; on the authority of Ibn 'Umar may Allah be pleased with him. *Al-Hakim* said about the Hadith, 'It fulfills the criteria of *Al-Bukhari* and *Muslim*. *At-Tirmidhi* narrated it (Hadith, 1171) in the form of a marfu' Hadith, which was attributed to Prophet Muhammad himself (Hadith, 2165). He graded it as good and authentic, yet scarce, i.e. having only one narrator in one of its stages, when related in this way'.

The same style is used in Allah's Command outlawing the consumption and distribution of intoxicants: 'O you who have believed! Intoxicants, games of chance, idolatrous practices and [divination by] arrows are [nothing] but a loathsome evil of Satan's handiwork: avoid it, then, so that you may prosper!' (*al-Ma'ida*: 90) However, some people say that there is not a single verse in the Quran prohibiting intoxicants. Glory be unto Allah. Which is more strict and compelling—to say, 'Do not consume intoxicants' or 'Avoid intoxicants altogether'? Evidently, the former just prohibits intoxicants. In other words, one may distribute, purchase, manufacture, and transport intoxicants. On the other hand, the latter's use of the word 'avoid' necessitates one keeps away from it completely and does not deal with it in any conceivable place or manner. Clearly, the word 'avoid' expresses a much stronger prohibition than a straightforward declaration. How can we assert that the word 'avoid' is less commanding than a straightforward declaration when Allah *the Most High* addresses a very important issue of belief in the following terms: '...those who avoid evil forces lest they [be tempted to] worship them' (*az-Zumar*: 17). Do you say that the avoidance expressed here is less commanding than a straightforward proclamation, is the worship of evils not unlawful? Allah *the Most High* then says: 'indeed, it is an abomination' (*al-Isra*': 32). The word 'abomination' designates what is exceedingly vile. Indeed, the Lord *the Most High* has made illicit sex an abomination. When He *the Most High* created males and females, He decreed their union and procreation, That is, He defined the standard way for their union in marriage and did not leave the issue undecided for others to deal with as they wish. This Divine Plan aims to preserve human lineage and maintain the purity of progeny. Consequently, a man attains peace of mind about his own family and children. Indeed, the marriage contract unites a man with a woman and blesses them with the Divine Word and the prophetic way of life. How will you react if you have a marriageable daughter and you know that a young man keeps staring at her with longing attempts to approach her? Undoubtedly, a sense of protectiveness will rage in your heart. You might confront that man and turn the world upside down if necessary in expression of your dislike for his misbehaviour. On the other hand, if this young man proposes to your daughter, you welcome him warmly and are pleased that he has approached you. Afterwards, you call the family and a

beautiful celebration is organized. What happened? What made you welcome the one who proposed? What is the difference between the first approach and the second one? The difference is that one is lawful and the other is unlawful. That is why it is said, 'The lawful way removes any jealousy'. Therefore, the one who feels jealous for his daughter from the least lustful touch is now helping her in her marriage and giving her to her newly wedded husband in good conscience. Put simply, they are being united by the blessed Word of Allah, which has untold effects on human souls. Once the guardian of the prospective wife says, 'I agree to marry her to you' and the prospective husband responds, 'I accept', coolness and tranquillity descend on the hearts. These feelings give rise to joy and exuberance, for this sacred word affects the inner make-up of human beings and has a profound effect on creating harmony in every particle of the body and in every drop of blood.

The profound effects of the Word of Allah upon spouses are many; it particularly creates spiritual unity between them which results in them admiring and respecting one another and never feeling annoyed or irritated, or tending to be cruel. Likewise, the father does not feel jealous about his daughter. As such, when the Lord *the Most High* legislates '*idda* (the period of mandatory waiting following divorce or the husband's death before remarriage), we find that the '*idda* of the divorced women differs from that of widows. There is wisdom in that difference. The Lord *the Most High* knows the nature of the human soul and what affects it. If the wisdom behind the '*idda* is limited to assuring that the divorced woman or widow is not pregnant, one month or one menstrual cycle will be sufficient.

Obviously, the matter is more far-reaching than that. The woman is experiencing particular feelings; she is still labouring under the effect of the previous marriage because untying the bond of marriage results in negative as well as positive effects on both males and females. The woman grew accustomed to the ebb and flow of the lawful and legitimate union. For this reason, the divorced woman is not allowed to remarry before the conclusion of her '*idda*—the passage of three menstrual cycles.⁽¹⁾ This is enough time for

(1) Allah says concerning the mandatory waiting period for divorced women, in which it is lawful for the husband who pronounced the divorce once or twice to return the divorced =

the effect of a lawful and legitimate relationship she had to peter away and eventually disappear, so she will be ready to meet with another prospective husband. For the widow's *'idda*, her waiting period is four months and ten days.⁽¹⁾ A question may be raised, 'Why is the widow's waiting period longer?' In reply, divorce often takes place following a sense of dislike between the marital partners, which actually aids in reducing the effect of their marital experience. She is naturally reluctant or even dislikes continuing with him. Unlike the divorced woman, the widow lost her husband and their separation has nothing to do with any dislike. For this reason, her longing to be with him is more intense. This explains why she needs longer time to get over the lingering effects of her previous union. In this circumstance, the Lord *the Most High* takes woman's feelings into account concerning her wishes and desire to be with her deceased husband. Allah *the Most High* knows that her wishes and feelings need time to abate. During the time of the *'idda*, she can become psychologically ready to meet with another prospective husband. Indeed, harmony within the union of husband and wife does not rely on the intellect; rather, it is directly related to the natural emotional state of the spouses, which, in the first place, depends on compatibility between the male and the female. This compatibility gives rise to the harmonious co-mingling of the positive and negative elements that shape the man-woman relationship. Consequently, love and passion occur; binding and attaching them together in the process. Eventually, it is all—as mentioned earlier—a result of the profound effects of the oath taken in the Name of Allah. The shade that lies underneath that oath is where the husband and wife have united. This is the way the two spouses meet in comfort and serenity and find tranquillity in each other because their actual physical make-ups are now in accord and harmony. Consequently, the family is pleased and everyone is happy. Prophet

= woman into marriage and is also the period whose conclusion marks the time at which it is permissible for the divorced woman to remarry someone else if she chooses to do this: 'The divorced women shall undergo, with-out remarrying, a waiting-period of three monthly courses...' (*al-Baqara*: 228), i.e. three monthly menstrual cycles.

(1) Concerning the *'idda* of widows, Allah says: 'If any of you die and leave wives behind, they shall undergo, without remarrying, a waiting period of four months and ten days; whereupon, when they have reached the end of their waiting-term, there shall be no sin in whatever they may do with their persons in a lawful manner' (*al-Baqara*: 234).

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was correct when he advised his community about the relationships with women, saying, 'And intercourse with them has been made lawful to you by the Words of Allah'.⁽¹⁾

This word is from Allah *the Most High* and Allah is the Creator of human beings; He knows what sets them right. Now, imagine that this union takes place in an illicit manner without the blessed Word of Allah. Only consistency, incompatibility, absence of harmony, bitterness, and rancour will occur, incessantly, as long as they are involved in such a relationship. That is why the Quran terms it 'an abomination'. The evidence of its abomination is found in the fact that the doers of this evil never like to be known and they keep their sins hidden from the community. Furthermore, those who commit this heinous misdeed hate to see the same act carried out with members of their own family. However, the most sufficient measure of its abhorrence is that Allah refers to it as such and enacts punishments for those guilty of this crime. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* addressed this illness when a young man approached him complaining of his weakness to control this natural sexual instinct. The man said, 'O Messenger of Allah! Permit me to have illicit sex'. Indeed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* introduced general religious principles, but he also addressed the maladies of individuals appropriately to overcome any type of weakness experienced and help individuals control such weaknesses. This approach is clear to us in the varied responses of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he was asked about the best of deeds. To one person, he said, 'Prayer in its appointed time'.⁽²⁾ To another, he said, 'Meeting your brother with a smiling face'.⁽³⁾ To a third, he said, 'Be kind to your brother'.

(1) *Muslim, sahih, (Hadith, 1218) on the authority of Jabir ibn 'Abdullah in a lengthy transmission; some of its content includes, 'Fear Allah in how you deal with women. You have taken them into the marriage bond as a trust from Allah and intercourse with them has been made lawful unto you by the Words of Allah'.*

(2) *Muslim, sahih, (Hadith, 85) in Kitab Al-Iman, on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud may Allah be pleased with him 'I asked the Messenger [Muhammad] peace and blessings be upon him 'Which deed is the best?' He responded, 'The prayer in its appointed time'.*

(3) *Muslim, Sahih, (Hadith, 2626); Ahmad, Musnad, (Hadith, 5: 173) on the authority of Abu Dharr may Allah be pleased with him who said, 'The Messenger [Muhammad] peace and blessings be upon him said to me, "Do not look down at any good deed, even meeting your brother with a smiling face".'*

In this way, he gave various responses because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not describing a general rule for the entire community. On the contrary, he gave each questioner what he needed to remedy his particular weakness. Like a doctor who concerns himself with curing a patient, he diagnosed and tested patients to determine the disease and prescribe the appropriate medication. For example, how did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* reply to the young man who told him about his observance of religious duties, such as Prayers and Fasting, but him not being able to overcome his sexual instinct. Did he slam the door in his face and label him as a pervert? No! Instead, Prophet Muhammad saw his spiritual suffering and realised that the man came looking for a cure after recognizing that he had a disease. Admitting one has a disease is the first step towards a cure and recovery. The young man approached Prophet Muhammad for no other reason than he hated that illness. The recognition of the disease is the earliest sign of recovery. Do not be too arrogant to admit your problem. Being too arrogant to admit your problem will, in turn, only aggravate the disease and complicate matters. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* considered the complaint of this young man as a healthy sign of faith. He only came to voice his complaint, for he felt it was an unbearable sin, but he yearned for it. Observe very closely how Prophet Muhammad treated this illness. He sat him down and then said, 'My brother Arab, will you be happy if this happened to your mother?' The young man's facial expression changed and he retorted, 'No! O Messenger of Allah; may I be your ransom'. The Prophet continued, 'Will you be happy if this happened to your sister? Will you be happy if this happened to your wife? Will you be happy if this happened to your daughters?' After each question, the young man responded, 'No! O Messenger of Allah; may I be your ransom'. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then said, 'Similarly, other people will not be happy if that happened to their mothers, to their sisters, to their wives or daughters'. Prophet Muhammad then placed his noble hand on the chest of that young man and prayed, 'O Allah, purify his heart and protect his chastity!'⁽¹⁾ The young man then

(1) Ahmad, *Musnad*, (5/256-257); Al-Tabarani, *Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir*, 8: 190-215 from Abu Umamah may Allah be pleased with him in which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be*

departed. Later he expressed what he felt by saying, 'When I left the Messenger [Prophet Muhammad], there was nothing more detestable to me than illicit sexual intercourse. I swear by Allah, I was not enticed by anything like that but I remembered my mother, sisters, wife, and daughters'. The way Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* treated that young man is strikingly similar to how pharmacists treat people.

There is a technical term called 'encapsulating bitter drugs'. If the medication is so bitter that the sick person is reluctant to take it, they sweeten it for the drug to pass his taste buds without any bitterness being noticed. The Creator *the Most High* has only placed taste buds in the tongue, to the exclusion of all other parts of the body where the food passes. The tongue is a sign of Allah's miraculous creation of human beings. It is one of the manifestations of Allah's Creative Power in the sense that He created it with small well-defined glands, each gland recognising a particular type of taste; one for sweet food, another for bitter food and so on. Each performs its own function, although all the glands are closely compacted and pressed together.

Like the process of encapsulating the bitter drug to sweeten the bitter medicine, the 'moral medicine' encases the advice in a way that makes the advisee accept it. It is said, 'Advice is a weighty issue; you should give it gently'. It is also said, 'Facts are bitter, therefore express them elegantly, and avoid harsh words and debates'. The adviser should consider the condition of the advisee and be gentle with him. He should not make the advisee experience the difficulty of being deprived of something he wants to do and also the difficulty of receiving unnecessarily coarse advice. The Lord *the Most High* has laid out the method of calling others to His Path for us to follow. Allah says: 'Call [all mankind] to the Path of Your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation' (*an-Nahl*: 125). Privacy is one of the etiquettes of giving advice which we learned from the Prophet. No advice is useful if we disclose private and sensitive information about people. Such disclosure negatively affects the advisee and the entire community. If you maintain the desired level of privacy, you will find it more likely that the advisee will accept your advice.

= *upon him said, 'O Allah! Forgive his sin, purify his heart and protect his chastity'. After that, the young man never even slightly inclined towards any indecent behaviour.*

An old saying states, 'Secret words of advice to your brothers save their face and affect their behaviour beautifully, whereas words of advice given publicly shame and defame them'.

Continuing with the verse under discussion, Allah *the Most High* says: 'an evil way' (*al-Isra'*: 32). The word '*sabeel*' refers to a path that leads to a goal. As for the path of life, we are Allah's vicegerents on this earth; Allah has created us to cultivate and develop the world and strive to secure the means that lead to human happiness, welfare, and prosperity. If a human being chooses misguidance and deviates from the path that the Creator laid down for him, he violates the divinely given vicegerency. Instead of filling the world with happiness, he fills it with sorrow. I think the moral dissolution and wantonness we witness these days and their dreadful effects that have reached Muslim lands give us reason to believe that illicit sex is an evil way and a despicable path. It undermines the integrity, felicity, and security of the community. It is enough that whenever you leave your home for any overnight trip, you take all your personal belongings with you. The perpetual fear of the possibility of infection pursues you everywhere; in the apartment you enter, in the bed you sleep and even in the washroom you use. Everyone is frightened and anxious, and AIDS has spread like wildfire. The situation has grown so alarming that not even the safety of the cautious and hygienic travellers can be assured.

The fright we experience is just a result of humans abandoning the way of Allah; such abandonment has turned our life into an endless chaos. Allah allowed new diseases and maladies to breakout in proportion to human shamelessness and disobedience. Since man is too stubborn to turn in repentance to Allah, let him forcibly come in overwhelming fear. The entire world is developing educational programs that promote chastity and purity; however, they are not motivated by faith in the Divine Law, but such pure stances are imposed by anxious fear of many merciless diseases that affect people without discrimination. In essence, illicit sexual intercourse is an abomination and an evil way. The recent occurrences support the truth of this verse. They prove that any deviation from the Way of the Creator will only lead to distress for the creation in the life of this world as a prelude to the distress of the

Hereafter. But preserving people's honour and guaranteeing the purity of lineage will create a wholesome and sound community where man is secure about this matter. However, we also have to endeavour to preserve human life. Allah *the Most High* says:

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا النَّفْسَ الَّتِي حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ وَمَنْ قُتِلَ مَظْلُومًا فَقَدْ جَعَلْنَا
لَوْلِيِّهِ سُلْطَانًا فَلَا يَسْرِفُ فِي الْقَتْلِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ مَنْصُورًا ﴿٣٣﴾

Do not take life, which God has made sacred, except by right: if anyone is killed wrongfully, We have given authority to the defender of his rights, but he should not be excessive in taking life, for he is already aided [by God] [33]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 33)

“And [oh people] do not take any human being's life” (*al-Isra'*: 33). In conformity with the plural verb (oh people, do not take) which is used in the verse, we expect the sentence to use a plural subject (lives); that is, we expect the following, ‘[Oh people] do not take the human lives that Allah has willed to be sacred’. However, the Lord *the Most High* wants to declare that the responsibility for the life of any one person is collective and universal. It is not simply the killer who is questioned about the murder, but the entire community. ‘Which Allah has willed to be sacred’ (*al-Isra'*: 33) Allah has made this life itself sacred; that is, it is not permissible to harm it in any way. It is a structure that was fashioned and created by Allah. The structure of Allah should not be damaged by anyone besides Him. Or it can be read: ‘...human being's life which Allah has willed to be sacred’ (*al-Isra'*: 33) which means that Allah has made it prohibited to kill this life. As for His saying, ‘other than in [the pursuit of] justice’ (*al-Isra'*: 33), it is an exception from the preceding rule: ‘Do not take any human being's life, which Allah has willed to be sacred’. This condition implies: However, you may need to take life in pursuit of justice. Justice, with regards to taking life is enacted in three situations:

- Retribution for murder.
- Execution for apostasy from Islam.
- Execution for adultery.

These are three legal causes for taking human life. Under these circumstances, the killing takes place in pursuit of justice. The enemies of Islam have caused much clamour over these laws as well as others, and have accused Islam of being harsh and barbaric. To support their claims, they mention that these punishments are inconsistent with human rights and dignity. Furthermore, they claim that this contravenes the principle of religious freedom as envisaged by Islam and expressed in the Word of Allah *the Most High*: 'There shall be no coercion in matters of faith' (*al-Baqara*: 256). As for the capital punishment for murder cases, they say, 'If the community suffers loss due to the untimely demise of one of its members, how can we increase the loss by killing another person?' In response I say, 'It is absolutely necessary that we understand and realise the purpose of the Divine Rulings. The objective that underlies the Divine Law of Retaliation in murder offenses is not to bring about a situation in which there is widespread killing; its only goal is to prevent murder and to endeavour to put an end to this crime from the onset. When the Lord informs you, "If you kill, you will be killed," He is protecting your life and the lives of others. Undeniably, the human being possesses nothing more valuable than his life. As such, even the cold-blooded killer is prevented from killing another for no other reason than he desires to stay alive. There are reasons that drive a murderer to commit the crime; perhaps the victim disgraced the killer, violated his honour or regarded him as an enemy. But without doubt, the murderer's life is more valuable than that. When we say, "If you kill, you will be killed," we prevent him from committing this crime. We are threatening him with the harshest punishment possible. This is why it is said, "Killing is the best means to prevent killing"'.

Allah *the Most High* says: 'In [the law of] just retribution, O you who are endowed with insight, there is life for you' (*al-Baqara*: 179). This assertion targets those who possess a sound understanding and perceptive minds. The law of retribution is not as some may imagine it. Quite the reverse, it provides security for life, defends the integrity of the community and prevents bloodshed. We must have a properly adjusted sense of right and wrong when approaching Allah's Rulings. The killer only kills when he is unmindful of the ruling. Additionally, we must survey the law of retribution objectively; it is essential for us to consider the following:

- Just as the law of retribution protects others from murder, it protects me from being murdered by others.
- The duties you owe others are the same as the duties they owe you. The benefit you experience from this law is the same as the benefit all others experience from it.

Hence, why are there any objections? The same applies for theft. When Allah commands you, 'Do not steal', you view it an order that restricts your personal conduct. In truth, it actually restricts the conduct of others from stealing from you. Whoever reflects deeply upon the rationale underlying these punishments finds them to be in the interest of all individuals. They restrict the potential harmful behaviours of the individual as well as of the entire community. For example, when the Wise Lawgiver makes *zakat* (obligatory charity) an obligation upon you to pay a specified portion of your wealth to the poor, do not say, 'It is my money; I have earned it through sweat and hard work'. We say to you, 'Yes, it is your money; nonetheless, do not forget that the days are made up of a shifting of fortunes and changes of fate. Today's wealthy might be tomorrow's poor; when the days bite you, you will find someone who will provide a helping hand for you and give your needs the consideration that you once gave to the needs of others'. Put simply, we must be judicious when approaching the Rulings of Allah *the Most High* and view matters from all directions. In such a case, we can see how they protect us and at the same time restrict our actions. Since these enactments protect us to the same degree they restrict our actions, they qualify as just laws. The law of retribution protects and secures human life, and subdues any individual's intention to commit murder. If a person becomes heedless of this ruling and commits this crime, he must receive reprisal. If we want to object to these punishments by referring to humanity, human dignity and mercy, as some claim, let it also be known that the one who objects to the execution of murderers willingly contributes to the death of millions. He opens the door of anarchy, disputes, and differences. Everyone who differs with another will hasten to kill him because there is no means in place to check and deter him from committing murder. That is, in order to prevent murder we must implement the Ruling of Allah and establish His Law, even against those

closest to us. These rulings are not revealed to be merely recited. Absolutely not! They were revealed as practical methods for organizing our lives and protecting the community. This explains why the Lord *the Most High* made the 'carrying out' of these punitive measures a public event witnessed by the community. Witnessing and hearing are for the entire community to be assured that Allah's Rulings are not considered to be empty threats. In reality, they are quite the opposite; they are being implemented before their very eyes. Allah *the Most High* declared: 'Let a group of the believers witness their punishment' (*an-Nur*: 2). The opponents of the law of retribution for murder crimes also criticize the punishment of apostasy. For them, it is a barbaric and repressive measure that violates religious freedom; a right that is upheld by Islam. Allah says: 'There shall be no coercion in matters of faith' (*al-Baqara*: 256).

In fact, when Islam enacted the punishment of apostasy and ruled that the apostate shall be killed, it aimed to make the issue of accepting Islam graver for non-Muslims. Consequently, only the sincere and those whose hearts found contentment in Islam accepted it, as they were fully aware that recanting their commitment to Islam after taking the testimony of faith results in death. It should be a merit rather than a demerit. It entails laying out the conditions of accepting Islam from the onset and clarifying the end of the path you are thinking of embarking on. As for freedom of religion and belief, it is your right before accepting Islam. No one will compel you at all; if you choose to continue your present lifestyle, it is your right. However, if you choose Islam, think carefully, reflect deeply, and survey the issue as much as you can. There is no room for trial runs in the religion of Allah. If you are moved towards Islam, remain within its sphere, but if you are not pleased with it, refrain from it. If you understand these conditions at first, you have no legitimate reason to criticize the punishment of apostasy. Know that the religion of Allah *the Most High* is far too distinguished and majestic to beg someone to enter it.

'If anyone has been slain wrongfully' (*al-Isra*': 33). The verse refers to a negative behaviour that should not have taken place. The word 'wrongfully' means anyone killed unjustly for a reason other than the three reasons mentioned above. However, if this wrongful murder occurs, what is the Divine Judgment? Allah *the Most High* answers: 'We have given authority to

his next of kin [to exact a just retribution]; but let him (the next of kin) not commit excesses in [exacting retribution, that is] killing' (*al-Isra'*: 33). The next of kin here is the individual responsible for defending the rights of the victim. He is one of the family members of the deceased, e.g., father, brother, son or paternal uncle, chosen to seek justice on his behalf. This is the party responsible for demanding requite for his slaying. The term: '...have given authority...' (*al-Isra'*: 33) means We made it his right and gave him the legal jurisdiction to take the life of the murderer. Authority should be used to carry out orders and enable one to implement Allah's command. Likewise, the community of believers should also stand beside him and aid the execution of this judgment. This is because any individual should follow Allah's Laws himself, but if he becomes weak and tends to violate these laws (by wrongfully murdering another, for example, he must be deterred by an outside force, e.g., the authorities and the believing community, who must assist in establishing justice. The Lord *the Most High* empowers the appointed relative of the deceased to pursue justice through the law of retaliation. If the deceased has no one to take up his cause, this right moves to the relevant authorities, who take up the responsibility of carrying out this judgment. However, when the whole process of retaliation goes to the authorities and becomes drawn out and cumbersome, the technical procedure undermines the objectives of the original ruling. In turn, the flames of resentment, rancour, and animosity burn in the heart of the guardian of the victim and leave him in rage. The guardian suffers through these extended legal proceedings whereas the other parties involved are unaffected by their extension. In fact, lengthening the period of legal proceedings only benefits the murderer. Actually, the passage of days or possibly years lets the horribleness of the crime lose its effects in the minds of the people as it begins to find its way into oblivion. At such a time, the crime becomes insignificant and its contemptibility is forgotten. As such, instead of facing the murderer and wanting to requite him for the crime he committed, sentiments and emotions begin to change and people begin to only think of the soul that is about to be put to death. As a result, they sympathize with the killer instead of thinking that he needs to be punished for the crime. However, the law of retaliation should be executed before the awfulness of the crime

abates in the minds of the people and loses its impact. Nonetheless, although the Lord *the Most High* has legislated retaliation and made it the responsibility of the guardian of the victim, He does not want to prevent the community from seeking forgiveness that can conclusively end the differences. Allah *the Most High* says: 'Whoever is forgiven anything by his brother, then it is to be followed with kindness and goodness towards him' (*al-Baqara*: 178). Against a backdrop of murder and bloodshed which teams with vengeance, the Lord *the Most High* talks about forgiveness, brotherhood and a lofty conduct. Despite all pains, the believers constitute one brotherhood; the doors of forgiveness and magnanimity are often open. As such, the guardian of the victim who has the right to demand retaliation is also encouraged to forgive; he may choose to accept blood money and forgive the killer. This would effectively settle the case. Additionally, he may waive the payment of the blood money, either partly or entirely. In other words, the payment of the blood money by the guilty (to spare his life) grants the guardian a measure of control and dominance over him. Allah *the Most High* has given the guardian the right to demand that the killer be brought to justice and suffer retaliation. But if he decides to forgive the killer, the killer will understand that his life is a gift from the guardian of the victim. This describes the exchange that takes place, turning hatred and animosity into harmony, peace, and friendship. In this way, any chain of vengeance, that is often never-ending, can be eliminated. It is well known that in Upper Egypt any killer tries to prompt the guardians of the victim to forgive him: The killer gathers his funeral shroud around him and goes to the guardians of the victim and submits himself to them in acknowledgment of the crime he committed. He is giving the guardians all their rights to deal with him in any way they choose. However, what can the guardians do when facing such a complete surrender except forgive and pardon the killer! In this way, animosity and hatred are completely uprooted.

The Lord *the Most High* then says: 'Let him not commit excesses in [exacting retribution that is] killing' (*al-Isra*': 33). In other words, since Allah has given you the right to execute equal retaliation, do it without transgression and excessiveness. Forms of transgression are many. The following are just examples of transgression and excessiveness:

- The convicted murderer may not be a highly regarded member of his family. The guardian may not, in such a case, be satisfied with killing him for his crime and may ask for another person with a high status and position to kill instead. Here, he seeks to kill an innocent person which is a form of transgression.
- Transgression may also be in quantity. For instance, if someone is killed and the guardian is not content by simply bringing the killer to justice; instead, hatred, animosity and blood feuding lead him to commit multiple murders.
- It may also be displayed by him mutilating the body of the executed killer; he is not satisfied with simply executing the killer. Hatred and rage are not supposed to drive you to transgress the legitimate boundaries. In fact, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to mutilate the killer of *Hamzah may Allah be pleased with him* but Allah forbade him from doing this⁽¹⁾.

Allah *the Most High* then says: ‘Truly, he is indeed helped [by Allah]!’ (*al-Isra'*: 33) In other words, it is not for the guardian to exceed the proper bounds of equal retaliation, for the Lawgiver has not left him without support; the Lord has given him the complete right to demand and exact retribution. As such, it is a Divine Obligation to proceed in the process of seeking justice following the limits of Allah without overstepping the boundaries. Indeed, if he transgresses the limit and kills other than the convicted murderer, he himself will be killed in requital for the unjust murder he committed. After that, the Lord *the Most High* says:

(1) *When Hamzah may Allah be pleased with him was killed and mutilated at Uhud, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘If Allah supports me against them, I will mutilate thirty of their men’. When the Muslims heard of this, they said, ‘By Allah, if we are given power over them, we will mutilate them as no Arabs before them have ever been mutilated’. Then Allah revealed: ‘Hence, if you have to respond to an attack, respond only to the extent of the attack leveled against you; but to keep patient is far better for [you, since Allah is with] those who are patient in adversity’ (an-Nahl: 126).*

وَلَا تَقْرَبُوا مَالَ الْيَتِيمِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ حَتَّىٰ يَبْلُغَ أَشُدَّهُ
وَأَوْفُوا بِالْعَهْدِ إِنَّ الْعَهْدَ كَانَ مَسْئُولًا

Do not go near the orphan's property, except with the best [intentions], until he reaches the age of maturity. Honour your pledges: you will be questioned about your pledges [34] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 34)

Again, the Lord uses the expression: 'And do not approach' (*al-Isra'*: 34). He did not say, 'Do not consume the property of orphans!' But He prohibits us from approaching or even thinking of violating the property of an orphan, for an orphan is weak. As such, it is inappropriate to take advantage of him. *Al-Yateem* (i.e. the orphan) is a child whose father passed away before he reached the age of puberty and maturity. He has lost his father and has no one else to look after him; he is overcome with grief and pain when he sees other children with their loving fathers. He will become distressed about his fate which prevented him from having a father in his life.

The Lord *the Most High* first consoles the heart of the bereaved orphans and quells their emotions. He then advises the community to take on the responsibility of caring for them. As such, the orphans feel that, though they suffered the loss of their biological father, the Muslim community are all fathers for them. Their care for the orphans coupled with their tenderness is a compensation for their lost fathers.

Furthermore, a person's heart feels content when he sees that the orphan is honoured within the faith-centred community; the community looks after him and offers him support inasmuch that each member of the community considers him as his son. As such, an individual is not vexed by life's trials nor is he fearful lest his children become orphans, for they will find the same form of consideration, help, and care in the community. To summarize, if the orphan finds such fatherly care and compassion from the community, he will be content with his decree and accept the Divine Predestination. Moreover, human souls feel assured about the future of their children if they become orphans.

Allah *the Most High* then says: 'except in the best way (to improve it)' (*al-Isra'*: 34). Namely, do not take advantage of an orphan's vulnerable

situation; he is still young and dependent upon others—you must not greedily consume his property or misappropriate it unjustly. His saying: ‘except in the best way (to improve it)’ (*al-Isra'*: 34) is an exception from the previous statement: ‘and do not approach’; it is permissible to approach the wealth of an orphan if our intent is to enhance it.

The word ‘*ahsan*’ (the best way) is a superlative, which indicates an amplified presence of good. It is as though we have two descriptions: one is good and the other is the best. In other words, it is not enough to approach the wealth of the orphan in a way that is good; you should rather approach it in the way that is best. This gives rise to the question, ‘What is the good way to approach the wealth of an orphan? And what is the best way?’ The good way of approaching the wealth is to refrain from arbitrarily squandering the wealth of the orphan and violating the property rights as you approach his wealth. However, the best way of approaching the wealth of an orphan is to increase it for them through wise investment and to preserve the principal until the orphans become capable of dealing with their money themselves.

That is why the Lord *the Most High* says: ‘But let them have their sustenance therefrom’ (*an-Nisa'*: 5). He did not say, ‘Let them take from it as their sustenance. To put it simply, letting them take from it for their sustenance will cause the money to decrease. However, the statement: ‘But let them have their sustenance therefrom...’ (*an-Nisa'*: 5) implies that the portion allotted to them from the money is taken from the profits, not from the principal. If this is not the case, imagine the case of one of the caretakers of an orphan who owns some property. He takes from the money of the orphan, pays the *zakat* and other financial obligations, and eventually spends all the money. Consequently, once the orphan reaches the age of majority when he can handle his own responsibilities, he will find nothing much of that money left.

The Lord *the Most High* commands the preservation of the orphan's wealth; that is, we should invest it to create profits and make it increase for these profits to cover the expenses of the orphan's life. The other possible scenario is that the child will not find any money left for him when he becomes a young man. The Lord *the Most High* wills the orphan to have access to the expertise and experience of those adults with backgrounds in making and managing wealth.

Perhaps there is a skilful expert who does not have liquid cash. He may invest the money of the orphan and take his share from the resulting profits in a fair manner. But if he is wealthy, he should completely abstain, because taking anything from it is impermissible for him. Allah *the Most High* says: 'Let him who is rich abstain entirely [from his ward's property]; and let him who is poor partake thereof in a fair manner' (*an-Nisa'*: 6). Indeed, if someone has experience in money management and is suitable for the task, we should not allow that experience to go to waste, nor do we deny the orphan's access to it. In this way, we extend benefits for the experienced entrepreneur who has no wealth and for the orphan who cannot manage his money. In this way, the members of the community of believers help and complement each other.

Allah *the Most High* then says: 'before he comes of age' (*al-Isra'*: 34), i.e. until he grows, matures and reaches the age of maturity. Is the 'age of maturity' enough to give the orphan control over his property? In fact, it is not sufficient. He may be—despite his age—a dull-witted individual, who acts irresponsibly with money. In such a circumstance, it is not permissible for us to leave him unattended or free to squander the wealth as he chooses. Allah *the Most High* says: 'If you find them to be mature of mind, hand over to them their possessions' (*an-Nisa'*: 6). In a separate verse, Allah *the Most High* says: 'Do not entrust to those who are weak of judgment the possessions which Allah has placed in your charge' (*an-Nisa'*: 5). He did not say, 'their wealth' due to the fact that those of weak judgments do not own or retain property rights. The money belongs to their guardians, who are charged with the responsibility of preserving and investing the wealth on their behalf.

The age of maturity designates the existence of sufficient mental capacity and the ability to comport oneself with decency. It is a vital condition for the orphan to take his wealth and manage it. The phrase: 'of age' (*al-Isra'*: 34) means to reach the point of physical maturity, i.e. have balanced and even behaviours; he is no longer a gangly child. The organs of the human being grow and mature through the passage of days until he reaches maturity and mental discernment. It is the time when he enters puberty and becomes well balanced. Allah then determines that puberty is the time at which the human

being assumes moral responsibility. If Allah charges man with moral responsibility before the age of puberty, when the onset of puberty takes place, man may object to being held responsible before he had undergone the changes in his physical make-up at puberty.

Allah *the Most High* says: 'And be true to every promise—for, verily, [on the Judgment Day] you will be called to account for every promise which you have made!' (*al-Isra'*: 34) The 'promise' refers to one's contracts or agreements with others; a voluntary agreement which a person undertakes and for whose results and terms he is responsible. The first ever contract which was endorsed was the contract of faith taken from all human beings to worship Allah alone; nevertheless, you are free to accept faith in good conscience or to live outside its boundary. Allah does not desire that our bodies feign humility before Him; rather, He desires that our hearts consciously submit to Him in reverence. If He willed that everybody be forced to submit to Him, not one of us could deviate from the path of faith in Allah. Thus, the Lord *the Most High* spoke to His Messenger [Mohammad] saying: 'You will perhaps kill yourself with anguish because they do not accept the faith! If We had so willed, We could have sent down to them a sign from the heavens so that their necks will be bowed down before it in utter humility' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 3-4). Allah did not will for their necks to come by force, but He willed that their hearts come in obedience and submission. However, many people confuse this issue; when commanding one of them to perform a religious requirement, he may reply: 'There shall be no coercion in matters of faith' (*al-Baqara*: 256). In response I say, 'You have not interpreted the verse accurately. The verse means that there is no coercion to enter the faith. However, after you accept the faith, you have to fulfil its duties. Accepting this contract of faith means that you are willing to fulfil all the requisites, with regards to worship and your manners, which result from this acceptance. This explains why contracts are binding on believers and fulfilling them is a sign of faith. You are free to meet with so-and-so or free to decline to meet with him. Only if you make an appointment, does it become your duty to actually see him. In such a situation, the party that is preparing to meet with you has arranged their schedule and all subsequent activities to accommodate this meeting. If you call off your meeting and break

the agreement you have made, you have given yourself the right to cancel this appointment, but placed the other party in an awkward situation.

This characteristic can never be present in a believer. In fact, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has included it among the characteristics of a hypocrite.⁽¹⁾ Furthermore, Allah's saying: '...and be true to every promise—for, verily, the covenant is a great responsibility' (*al-Isra'*: 34) could either mean: You will be held responsible for your pledges. Every person will be asked about his pledges, whether he has fulfilled them or not? Or the phrase: '...is a great responsibility...' could signify that the contract will not be the responsibility of the contracting parties, but the contract itself is the one that carries the responsibility of fulfilling what is stipulated in it. It is as though Allah has linked the responsibility to the contract or agreement itself. So you and I are free of any responsibility, it is the (obligation prescribed by) the contract itself that shall be held responsible.

In some instances, the Lord *the Exalted* uses the passive participle in places that at first glance appear inappropriate. Nonetheless, after investigating and looking intently, you find that its usage reflects the height of eloquence, such as when Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And when you (Muhammad) recite the Quran, We put between you and those who believe not in the Hereafter, a veil which is concealed' (*al-Isra'*: 45). You will notice that the passive participle '*mastura*' (which is concealed) is used here. In a literal sense, a veil (*hijab*) is an object which is used to cover, but it is not itself '*covered*'. But in this verse, the Lord wants to represent the veil as being dense and impenetrable; as though it, itself, is covered with a separate veil. This is similar to how some well-to-do people arrange the curtains in their homes in two layers. In this way, the curtain itself becomes covered with another curtain. The same idea is clear in Allah's Statement: '...a shelter of a shade which is shaded' (*an-Nisa'*: 57); that is the shade is very deep as it itself is shaded.

(1) *It was narrated on the authority of 'Amr ibn Al-'As may Allah be pleased with him that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Four qualities which, if found in a person, make him a pure hypocrite, and whoever has one of them has a trait of hypocrisy until he gives it up: when he speaks, he lies; when he is entrusted, he betrays; when he makes a promise, he breaks it; and when he disputes, he becomes obscene'. Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (book of authentic Hadiths) (58) and by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (2459).*

We should ponder on the state of a community in which pledges are not honoured and agreements are breached. A community whose members give little or no regard to the values of fulfilling commitments and having honest intentions is found to be a broken community, a community in which people do not trust each other. Once confidence, commitment, and honest pledges—which are the axes upon which the community turns—have been lost; you can be assured that such a community is bound to fail. It becomes no longer amenable to growth or development.

Due to the importance of pledges and covenants in Islam, you will find that an agreement becomes binding merely by a verbal promise. It does not require official registration because the believer can be counted on to stand by his word, even if it is not written down and notarized. From this comes what people refer to as ‘Legal Rights’ and ‘Religious Rights’. For instance, people say, ‘this is legal and that is religious’.

The difference between them is obvious, but perhaps an example will help to further illustrate this. Assume you have taken a loan from your friend, and you gave your friend a loan receipt for the amount for him to feel reassured; later, you met him at a time when you agreed to repay him and you settle the debt. However, he asked you to forgive him for not having the loan receipt at that moment, and you assured him saying, ‘It is really no problem, just send the receipt to me whenever you can’. But if we pause for a moment and imagine that this individual is going to act fraudulently and deny that you had ever paid the debt, in such a situation, according to the law, he has the right to be paid the debt he is owed; on the other hand, according to religion, he is not entitled to anything. In a word, the pledges and agreements that we conclude with people should be regarded as a religious rather than a legal obligation. Then Allah says:

وَأَوْفُوا الْكَيْلَ إِذَا كِلْتُمْ وَزِنُوا بِالْقِسْطَاسِ الْمُسْتَقِيمِ ذَٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَحْسَنُ تَأْوِيلًا ﴿٣٥﴾

And Give full measure when you measure, and weigh with accurate scales: that is better and fairer in the end [35]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 35)

The noble verse moves us to one of the gravest issues that face any community. It is the issue that guarantees to every human being the fruit and

outcome of his labours and hard work in this life. It ensures him that his efforts will serve his own best interests and not the interests of the domineering classes who are like parasites which feed off the hard work of others and nourish themselves by sucking the blood of the masses. If a person's efforts serve his own best interests, the lazy and indolent are thrown into despair. They know that they have no place within a productive and active community. They will soon realize that if they continue to remain indolent, they will not find their daily bread. This gives them an impetus to work. This also helps enhance the workforce, uplift the community, and bring prosperity to its members.

It is true that any faith-based community is expected to be altruistic. However, this is the case for positive altruism that arises voluntarily from within the individual. In a faith-based community, there is no place for kidnapping, stealing, embezzlement, and forcible seizure. Such a community aims to organize life in a way that helps all people and stops anyone from being a leech on someone else's earnings.

Moreover, if we try to combat diseases caused by parasitic blood-sucking insects that nourish themselves on human blood, we must recognize that to try to combat 'human parasites' is a more worthy fight. As long as you are able to work, it is your responsibility to do so. As for those who are unable, they have legitimate excuses and should be treated with respect and deference. They have rights that should be fulfilled by the state and each individual Muslim. This is the security that Islam extends to all who are in need.

This is an opportunity to advise the wealthy people who contribute to meeting the needs of the poor, 'Do not moan and groan when we take this amount from you today; be sure that the ability and power that you exert to earn that money are not inherent in you—rather, they are gifts from Allah. As such, they can be taken away from you at any moment. Your strength can be exchanged for weakness, and your self-sufficiency for neediness. If this happens to you, we will provide for you (as you used to provide for others) and assure your future'. For this reason, it is essential that the human being contributes positively to life; everyone works and labours to contribute to the enhancement and enrichment of life. A human should not be content with

inactivity and listlessness as his lot because the faith-based community cannot equate the one who works with the one who idly sits doing nothing, or the active contributor with the indolent loafer.

Imagine two brothers who divided their inheritance equally among themselves. The first lived moderately with his money and strove in earnest to increase it. The second, on the other hand, lived extravagantly and wastefully, spending everything that he owned until finally he ended up destitute and regretful over what he had lost. It is not right to equate this with that, nor is it reasonable to take from one (the responsible and earning brother) and give to the other (the lazy and wasteful brother). You should absolutely not do this because when human beings—and nations as well—take that which is not rightfully theirs, Allah burdens them with extra problems.

Consequently, it is unlawful to begrudge wealthy people their wealth when it is the product of their own labour and the outcome of their personal striving, as long as they practice moderation in spending their wealth and discharge all their financial obligations towards the community. We should leave them to work assiduously using all the abilities, talents and aspirations they have because the poor will eventually benefit from them and their aspirations, whether they like it or not. Therefore, we should let them work for indeed, even if it appears that they are simply working for themselves, in actual fact, the benefit of their hard work will reach you as well. Prosperity in the community extends to all its members.

Let us suppose that one of these wealthy persons wanted to establish a factory, a building, or a huge project. How many workers and craftsmen will be needed to complete the task? How many managers and engineers will benefit from this project? Any wealthy person who aspires to undertake a project on such a scale will not make any achievements until the work that is needed to fulfil them has turned into food and clothing for the poor.

To put it succinctly, we must leave the wealthy individual to strive and work diligently because the community will reap benefit from his diligence and hard work. Your only duty is to watch over him. If his pursuits proceed in legitimate and productive directions, then all is well and good. But if his pursuits proceed in wrongful directions, he must be deterred.

Allah *the Exalted* shows you the best way to ensure your happiness in life and how to act properly; He says: 'And give full measure when you measure' (*al-Isra'*: 35). The discussion that is being laid out here is not simply about weights. On the contrary, it is applicable to all kinds of weights and measures that are used to quantify things in the transactions of life; for example the units of measure used for length. These are units of measurement which are calculated in millimetres, centimetres, metres, or kilometres. Each object is measured in accordance with the unit of measurement that corresponds to its size; a book is measured in centimetres, a room in metres, and a road in kilometres. Clearly, the units of measure used to quantify length must correspond to the object that we are measuring; this is the case for the units used for measuring length. To know the area of objects, length and width are employed. As for the volume of a solid, it is calculated in terms of length, width, and height; and a balance is used to measure mass.

In fact, life can be precisely measured in units that quantify volume, and scales are used to determine the weight of a mass. We have the units of measure (cubic content) which help us determine sizes, and weights which help us assess masses. Masses are not measured in cubic content; rather, the amount of a mass is only known through weight. This is evidenced by the fact that a kilogram of cotton consists of much more (material) than a kilogram of iron. This means that the standards of measurement must be correct. This is why Allah *the Exalted* says: 'And give full measure when you measure...' (*al-Isra'*: 35); this means: Give full and accurate measure without any depreciation in the value by either side.

In another noble verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Woe to those who give short measure (*al-Mutaffifin*), 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)

'Those who give short measure' refers to those who increase their portion (by decreasing or lessening other people's portions). These people make sure that when they receive a measure from other people, they take the full exact amount. This is not in itself censurable; rather, what is censurable is: '...but give less than they should when it is they who weigh or measure for others!'

(*al-Mutaffifin*: 3) That is, when it is they who are measuring or weighing for people, they give less than what is due. That is to say: they cheat by giving an inaccurate measure. This is the behaviour for which they have been censured and blamed within the noble verse. A human being is not held blameworthy for demanding the full amount of his due in any transaction. On the contrary, he is blameworthy because he is not fair; he fails to treat others as he will like to be treated.

We observe that many people consider the '*tatfif*' (reduction of the quality and/or quantity of a product without changing the price) that is referred to by the word '*al-mutaffifin*' (those who give short measure) in the verse only refers to weights and measures. *Tatfif*, in fact, also refers to the price. The salesman who, for instance, fraudulently takes twenty grams from your one kilogram of goods has cheated you in both the weight and the price.

Allah, the Exalted and Glorious, then says: '...and weigh with a balance that is straight (*al-qistas al-mustaqim*)...' (*al-Isra'*: 35) that is: Make the scales precise, even, and free of any crooked dishonesty or intent to deceive.

The attentive reader will recognize that when emphasizing the accuracy of measurements during transactions, the Lord *Glorified is He* orders the people to measure goods properly and in full. He expressed it in this manner: 'And give full measure when you measure...' (*al-Isra'*: 35). But when He discusses the weights, the overriding focus is on precision. He has mentioned that it should be: '...a balance that is straight...' that is, not simply any balance, but one that gives a precise, equitable measure. The question that arises here is, 'Why is there a focus on flawless precision of weights, in particular?' If you scrutinize the process of measuring an object, you find that it is carried out in clear open view. The chances for a person to defraud are significantly low when measuring. In fact, cheating when measuring, in many cases, is detected and foiled. This is because measuring takes place in full view (of the customer), and any possible fraud attempts can be easily uncovered.

As for weighing, it is different. Weighing is more open to fraud, and the sellers have a thousand and one ways to tamper with the scales without anyone perceiving what they are doing. Scales, as we know, are simple balancing apparatuses that can carry and hold things. It consists of a pivot that is at the

centre. On one side of this pivot, we have the pan in which the unknown weight is placed, and on the other side, we have the pan in which the counterweight is placed. Any discrepancy in the weight that rests on the two pans will tip the scale off balance. If either pan is tampered with in any way, it will unsettle the scale.

If we wish to discuss at length the techniques of cheating used by sellers in the marketplaces, we will fill many pages. This explains why the Lord *the Exalted* was particular in stressing the duty of being precise when weighing. Certainly, it is a vast arena for fraudulent practices and consuming people's property unjustly.

We previously mentioned that the measurement of each object is taken in the unit of measurement that is suitable for it. The value and worth of an item are also factors that affect how it is measured; measuring limes is not like measuring almonds, gold, or diamonds. Therefore, part of the meaning of 'a balance that is straight' (*al-qistas al-mustaqim*) is that the scale should be properly calibrated to accurately measure the object being weighed. The one measuring gold, for instance, is weighing something valuable. Even if the amount being weighed is comparatively small, it will still equal a substantial amount of money. For this reason, experts in such matters caution the sellers from bringing their head near the scale, as they might be blowing into the pan of the scale. Surely, you can suffer loss on account of that simple blow!

But we should tell those whose hands have grown accustomed to fraudulent and deceptive practices while buying and selling, 'You only sell one product to the people and you cheat in it. However, at the same time you purchase many daily necessities of life. You should be well aware that when you cheat against the people who are buying your one product, you will be cheated against when buying hundreds of items. You will inevitably be the loser. Give no consideration to the assumptions and illusions that this will somehow work in your favour'.

Keep in your mind that above you is the Sustainer of existence; neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. Nothing about you is hidden from Allah. He will put in your path someone who will make you 'drink from your own cup' until you recognize the reality of such unprofitable and unbeneficial transactions. Even if you can escape the earthly legal authorities, you will not

be able to escape heavenly retribution. The money that you fraudulently took from people's provisions will go to waste without use, as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explained, 'Whoever acquires money by ill-gotten means, Allah will cause it to be dissipated in calamities'.⁽¹⁾ The inverse is also true. Anyone who deals honestly with the people when buying, selling, and carrying out transactions, Allah will surround him with those who will deal with him fairly and honestly.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '...That is good (advantageous) and better in the end' (*al-Isra'*: 35). The word 'that' refers to 'a balance that is straight' (*al-qistas al-mustaqim*), which always achieves the best of consequences. This implies that the opposite of 'a balance that is straight' (*al-qistas al-mustaqim*) results in bad and undesirable ends. The one who cheats and defrauds people thinks that these fraudulent practices will increase his wealth and bring him prosperity. We say to him, 'You are deluded. No good can come out of deception and minimizing the rights of others. In fact, profit through deception is loss itself because the Lord *the Exalted* will, in return, send to you those who will cheat you. This is the first point. As for the second point, it will not be long before the people discover your dishonesty in weighing and measuring, and cease to do business with you'. In short, measuring with anything besides 'a balance that is straight' (*al-qistas al-mustaqim*) does not contain any good and will not result in a favourable end.

On the other hand, Allah *the Exalted* will send the truthful seller who weighs with justice and gives full measures those who will give him just weights and full measures. In addition to this, he will become notable among the people for his honesty and trustworthiness, and people will jump at the chance to do business with him. This is what is intended by Allah's statement: '...That is good (advantageous) and better in the end' (*al-Isra'*: 35). This is the blessed end.

(1) Narrated by 'Ajiluni in *Kashf Al-Khafa'* (vol. 2, p. 313). He traced it back to Al-Quda'i who related it on the authority of Abu Salmah Al-Himsi with a chain of narrators which lead back to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, Abu Salmah Al-Himsi was classified as weak and his being a Companion is not verifiable. Subki said that he (Abu Salmah) did in fact meet Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but this information is incorrect.

The Lord then says:

وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ إِنَّ السَّمْعَ وَالْبَصَرَ وَالْفُؤَادَ
كُلُّ أُولَئِكَ كَانَ عَنْهُ مَسْئُولًا ﴿٣٦﴾

Do not follow blindly what you do not know to be true: ears, eyes, and heart, you will be questioned about all these [36] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 36)

Allah *Glorified is He* moves to another issue which involves the proper organization of life and the overall way of life of the human beings whom Allah has appointed as His vicegerents on the earth, and to whom He has granted life and provided with abilities and life's necessities.

After Allah has secured life's essentials for the human beings, He guided them as to how they should improve themselves in life through investigation and reflection. They should make the best of the intellectual capacities that Allah has endowed them with, employing the materials and energies that Allah created to enhance and enrich their lives and communities.

The process of advancement and enhancement of life cannot achieve meaningful outcomes unless the basis for it is sufficiently clear. If you strive to develop life upon the basis of a clear unambiguous principle, you will arrive at the desired results. For instance, the student who desires to enter Law School has a clear and well-determined objective. He joins the Law School, works assiduously, and realizes his goals and aspirations. This only happened because he had a clear reason to work about which he was convinced.

Accordingly, life's development must be based on well-established objectives. It is these firm objectives that make the individual engage in any meaningful pursuit, being confident that his work will lead to the desired results. Someone who wants to travel to Alexandria or Aswan, for instance, does not embark on the journey until he has clear directions about the route he is taking. This mirrors the process through which the development of life is pursued; it cannot be completed unless it is based on clear and well-defined 'directions' which exist in creation. When we say '*ilm*' (knowledge), we are referring to those directions.

We previously clarified the meaning of '*qadiyya*' (a fact, matter, or important question). It signifies a definite statement that will prove either the dishonesty or truthfulness of the one who is stating it. It is like saying, 'The earth is spherical', or 'the sun emits light', or 'the moon reflects light'. These pronouncements represent definitive scientific realities about which there is no argument. They are absolutely provable, demonstrable facts. This is the reality of knowledge.

As for ignorance, it is when you positively assert a '*qadiyya*' that is not in conformity with reality. In other words, it is false. Ignorance is not, as some believe, lack of knowledge. Being illiterate or uninformed is what constitutes lack of knowledge; the uninformed person has neither a true assertion nor a false one concerning a certain matter. This explains why we see the illiterate or uninformed more positively predisposed and amenable to education than the ignorant. The only thing you need to do with an uninformed person is educate him about a topic and he will quickly learn and adapt. Conversely, the ignorant must first have the erroneous notions that he believes to be true removed from his mind; then—and only then—can you teach him.

In terms of the major questions in life, we can separate them into two categories: The questions upon which the inclinations of people are in conflict, and the questions upon which the inclinations of people are in conformity. The questions upon which the inclinations of people are in conflict are the cases in which every person puts forward his own self-serving personal judgment, even if it is damaging to others. As long as the basis of an opinion concerning a certain question is whimsical, people will differ in their conclusions about it. Every individual has his own preferences. If each of us had to decide individually the outcome of every major matter, we will have never agreed on anything.

Indeed, the Lord *Glorified is He* has spoken the truth when He says: 'And if the truth had been in accordance with their desires, verily, the heavens and the earth, and whosoever is therein, will have been corrupted!' (*al-Mu'minun*: 71) If this is the case, what can be the way out of this disagreement and conflict? The way out entails that each of us frees himself from his capricious views, and then we should submit all matters over which we disagree to the One Who has no inclinations or prejudices.

Your Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* is the Only One Who has no inclinations or prejudices. We are all His creation. We are all equal in His Eyes. There is none among us who has a lineage with Allah. Allah's Law is one and impartial towards all, so no one can object to any of His rules; everyone is submissive to this law and bound to follow it. This is because it is Allah's Law, not a law made and enforced by humans.

Therefore, a popular saying goes, 'A finger cut by the Law does not bleed'. That is, I am not subservient to you nor are you subservient to me; rather, all of us are subservient to Allah *the Exalted* and His Command. In view of that, leave to Allah all the issues that are subject to conflicting desires and caprices. He will decide all these matters in order to release all of you from foreign, external imposition of values.

The questions upon which individual desires and opinions agree are the matters that are material or empirical. They are based on the fixed, incontrovertible characteristics of matter itself. They do not attempt to favour someone's viewpoint over that of another. Consequently, there is nothing wrong with following the opinions of others regarding them. Because of the empirical accuracy of these issues, you will have no choice but to accept them. The laboratory that you enter to carry out experiments in search for empirical data about a specific issue that relates to the material world or (more specifically) chemistry, for example, is a neutral lab; it does not seek to placate anybody.

We already said that there is no such thing as Russian or American electricity or chemistry. These constitute material facts on which there is no disagreement. Arbitrary and capricious inclinations are what create conflict between the East and West; the East is based on communism and the West on capitalism.

For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself laid down this demarcation (between faith-related questions and experiment-related questions), when he saw people cross-pollinating palm trees. He advised them to discontinue the practice of cross-pollination. They obeyed him and discontinued the practice of cross-pollinating their palm trees that year. The outcome was that the palm trees did not fructify. On the basis of practical experience, it was observed that the suggestion of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had been incorrect. From whom did

these instructions come? From Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah, the Prophet of Allah and His Messenger, who was keen that each opinion he gave was correct and truthful. However, he plainly said, 'You are more knowledgeable about your worldly affairs'.⁽¹⁾ In this way he set an example for over-zealous religious scholars who keep poking their noses into empirical, material facts. The Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* states: '... each group knew its drinking place...' (*al-Baqara*: 60), and of course Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has said, 'None of you truly believes until his inclinations are in accordance with what I have brought'.⁽²⁾

If you want your progress within life to take a wholesome and fruitful direction; one in which there is harmony and cooperation with others rather than one in which there is opposition and conflict, the Lord clearly states: 'And follow not (O human) that of which you have no knowledge...' (*al-Isra'*: 36) The essential point of this command is for you to progress in life relying on guidance and insight.

Allah's Injunction: 'And follow not (O human) ...' means not to pursue or interfere in matters of which you have no knowledge. Consider a person who, for example, claims to be capable of repairing televisions, while, in fact, he does not know anything about these devices. He will probably cause more damage to the television than repair.

In light of this, the juristic scholars have said, 'He who says, "I do not know" has given the (right) scholarly opinion' because by announcing his lack of knowledge about a particular issue, he is effectively referring the questioner to someone who is truly knowledgeable. If, on the other hand, he answers incorrectly, his answer will lead to undesirable consequences. Whoever

(1) Narrated by Muslim in his *Sahih* (2362) on the authority of Rafi' ibn Khadij in which he said that when the date palms did not bear fruit, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I am only a human being. So, when I command you about a thing pertaining to religion, act upon it; and when I suggest to you something out of my personal opinion, keep it in mind that I am only a human being'. Also, according to the Hadith narrated by Muslim in his *Sahih* (2363) on the authority of Anas, he said, 'You have better knowledge (of technical skills) in the affairs of the world'.

(2) Narrated by Ibn Abu 'Asim in the book of *As-Sunna* (vol. 1, p. 12) on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar. Ibn Rajab *Al-Hanbali* also mentioned it in *Jami' Al-'Ulum wal-Hikam* (p. 460), but he classed it as weak.

takes this course of action when approaching his worldly affairs, will have a life defined by failure.

The verb '*yaqfu*' (translated as 'follow' in the verse under study) is derived from the word '*qafa*', which refers to the back of something. In another noble verse, Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Then We sent, following in their footsteps (*qaffayna*), Our Messengers...' (*al-Hadid*: 27). This means, 'We sent successive Messengers who followed in one another's footsteps'. The expression '*yaqfu atharah*' means to walk behind someone.

A man once said, advising his son when he desired to marry⁽¹⁾, 'O son, do not choose her to be your wife if she has a child from a previous union (*hannana*), or if she will constantly remind you of what she gives you (*mannana*), or if she is a fair woman of bad origin (*'ushbat ad-dar*) or a two-faced woman (*kabbat al-qafa*).

The '*hannana*' is a woman who has a child from a previous marriage who may remind her of her love for his father. The '*mannana*' is a woman who has wealth or stature that she uses to lord over you. The '*'ushbat ad-dar*' is a fair woman who has been raised in a bad environment. The '*kabbat al-qafa*' is a woman who mentions a person's faults to others behind his back.

In the context of the verse under discussion, knowledge refers to all types of knowledge. This must be pointed out because many people believe that the word knowledge (*'ilm*) strictly refers to religious knowledge. However, knowledge (*'ilm*) is every type of information that enhances life. Knowledge can be categorized as being of two types:

- Religious knowledge: It is that which conclusively eliminates all conflicting desires and inclinations, so that all desires and inclinations are actuated by only one motive, faith. This type of knowledge is the preserve of only the Lord. We have no share in it. The Creator knows best about His creation. He has laid down the laws which regulate and maintain the universe because He knows best what improves and what worsens its condition.

(1) *Ibn Manzur, Lisan Al - 'Arab* under the root [*ha-nun-nun; ain-shin-baa*']. It was stated as an advice of a father to his son who wanted to marry.

In the same manner that you do not consult a butcher to learn how to service a television, for example, do not take the instructions for maintaining and servicing human beings from anyone other than their Creator. As the Quran says: 'How could He Who created not know His own creation, when He is the Most Subtle, the All Aware?' (*al-Mulk*: 14) Regarding this type of knowledge, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...so accept whatever the Messenger (Muhammad) gives you, and abstain from whatever he forbids you...' (*al-Hashr*: 7).

We should not interfere in these issues or attempt to add to them because they represent Allah's Way that has come with definitive commandments (Do this and do not do that). As a way, it is not amenable to augmentations or modification. Any prohibition or command that exists within it must be observed and honoured. If not, your choosing to abandon the way designed for you by your Lord and Creator will cause corruption in the world through your violation of His Prohibitions or Commandments. In terms of those affairs which the Creator *the Exalted* has left (to the discretion of the human beings), and issued neither a commandment nor a prohibition in respect to them, you are free to do or avoid them.

The attentive observer of the Law of the Creator *Glorified is He* finds that the matters of religious and moral obligation, contained in 'Do this' and 'Do not do that', are only few compared to matters about which you have a free choice. Therefore, reserve for your Lord and Creator—who possesses ultimate knowledge about you—a platform that grants Him the sole right to decide how you should live your life and how it should be organized. After all, are we not obligated, as Allah's creation and slaves, to accept His Judgment as the final word in all matters of faith, and keep our noses out of His Business?

As for the second type of knowledge, it is material and empirical knowledge which is not subject to caprice or prejudice. Rather, the Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* has made it an area of research, competition and a domain of active participation and contribution by all. And because of this, people inevitably receive and share information and data. Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* has given us an example of this type of knowledge in His Words: 'See you not that Allah sends down water (rain) from the sky, and We produce therewith fruits of varying colours. And among the mountains are streaks white and red, of

varying colours, and (others) very black. And of people, and moving living creatures, and cattle, in like manner of various colours...' (*Fatir*: 27-28).

The Lord *Glorified is He* mentions in the previous verse all classes of beings: humans, animals, plants and inanimate objects; and He concludes this with His Words: '...it is only those who have knowledge among His servants that fear Allah...' (*Fatir*: 28).

These are natural phenomena within the universe. Immerse yourself in them as you want; studying and researching them. If you devote yourself to their study with enough assiduity, they will help you arrive at other phenomena which will improve and uplift your life. The discoverer of the steam engine, the wheel, electricity, gravity or other scientific breakthroughs did not create something new (non-existent) in Allah's Universe. Their achievement lay in thoroughly examining and reflecting upon the phenomena of nature, which ultimately allowed the scientists to arrive at breakthroughs that brought ease and felicity to their respective communities as well as all the other communities in the world. For this reason, the Lord *the Exalted* warns us against letting the phenomena in the Universe pass us by without taking due notice or reflecting on them: '...and there are many signs in the heavens and the earth that they pass by and give no heed to...' (*Yusuf*: 105).

Designating scientific achievements with the word 'discoveries' is a truthful description that corresponds with the true state of matters; scientists have not brought something new into being—all these things already existed. They just earned the merit of finding and discovering them. In the light of this, the word 'invention' proves to be an imprecise term when used to describe such discoveries. Since Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* has forbidden us to involve ourselves in matters we are ignorant of, what, then, are the types of matters we are allowed to engage in and pursue? We should concern ourselves with matters that are within the scope of our knowledge and about which we are absolutely certain from among the various physical sciences.

To summarize, if the matter is religious, it is for the Creator to hand down laws to us regarding it. But if it is a material or empirical matter related to worldly affairs, we must use our minds to find the most beneficial, life-enhancing solutions. This explains why, after this, the Lord *Glorified is He*

speaks of the faculties that are needed for the acquisition of knowledge. He says: 'Verily! The hearing, the sight and the heart, [regarding] each of these [you] will be questioned (by Allah)' (*al-Isra'*: 36).

At this point, a question arises about the faculties used to attain knowledge when we consider the Command of the Lord *the Exalted* which states that we are forbidden to delve into matters of which we have no knowledge, but we should proceed in the light of the knowledge of matters about which we are certain. In fact, if it were not for these faculties, the human being will know nothing at all. This is made clear in the Statement of the Lord *the Exalted*: 'It is Allah who brought you out of your mothers' wombs knowing nothing, and gave you hearing, sights and minds, so that you might be thankful' (*an-Nahl*: 78). Do human beings give thanks for anything other than the outcomes they receive? This outcome is knowledge.

Once they emerge from their mother's wombs, the senses start to function in the human body, right after birth. Some people believe that an infant cannot understand anything until he grows up and becomes able to talk and communicate with others. Actually, a baby is aware and perceives things from the first days after birth.

For this reason, physiologists say that a baby is born with natural abilities of perception, which the specialists cautiously refer to as 'the five apparent senses'. Their cautious approach was appropriate because afterwards they discovered other senses such as the sense of muscle force which we use to distinguish heavy matter from that which is light.

Out of the various human senses, hearing and seeing are the most important. They are mentioned in the Quran in the following order: First is hearing, and next is sight because hearing precedes sight. The sense of hearing is fully operative at birth, but it is followed by sight within a few days after birth. This means that hearing develops and functions more rapidly than other senses. This is one reason. Another reason is that hearing is unique in that it is the only sense that performs its function even during sleep. This points us to the great Wisdom of the Creator *the Most High*; it is through the function of hearing that you are summoned from sleep.

Allah *the Most High* has given us a vivid depiction of this faculty in the story of the seven sleepers in the Cave. When Allah *the Exalted* willed that they should sleep for many years, He covered their ears with deafness and disabled their hearing. Without doing this, they will not have been able to sleep undisturbed for such a long period because of the noises outside the cave. Allah *the Exalted* says: 'We sealed their ears (with sleep), for a number of years, in the cave' (*al-Kahf*: 11).

Throughout Allah's Book, the sense of sight is mentioned before the sense of hearing in only one verse; that is: 'Our Lord, now that we have seen and heard, send us back and we shall do good...' (*as-Sajda*: 12). The discourse here is not about the life of this world; rather, it is about the Hereafter. This will be the time when people shall be terrified by the horrors they see on the Day of Judgement. In the Hereafter, people will see before they hear.

But in this life, hearing is the first of the senses to develop, and it the most important for the acquisition of knowledge. Even the one who learns by reading hears before he reads. The alphabet is learned first through hearing. Hence, hearing is used first in the process of education, and after that the role of sight comes into play.

A closer examiner of the noble verses in which hearing and sight have been mentioned will find that hearing is stated in the singular while sight is stated in the plural, such as Allah's saying: '...He gave you hearing, sights and minds...' (*as-Sajda*: 9). The only exception to this occurs in the verse at hand, which states: 'Verily! The hearing, the sight and the heart, [regarding] each of these [you] will be questioned (by Allah)' (*al-Isra'*: 36). We may ask why? What is the wisdom behind mentioning it in the singular form here?

Before we explain the wisdom behind this, we must be aware that the Speaker is Allah, the Most Exalted. As long as the Speaker is Allah, then every word must be meticulously positioned and very eloquently expressed for the context of the verse.

Hearing occurs in the singular form because the thing being heard does not vary in respect to those who hear it; if a sound rings out at this very moment, all of us will hear it. It is same in the ears of all those near it.

On the other hand, sight proves to be qualitatively different. In fact, we are, at this very moment, faced with various visible objects and different scenes. You are looking at something, but I am looking at something else. All of us in the same area hear the same sound, but this is not the case for what we see. This explains why hearing has been expressed in the singular form, whereas sight in the plural.

Allah's statement: 'Verily! The hearing, the sight and the heart, [regarding] each of these [you] will be questioned (by Allah)' (*al-Isra'*: 36) means that sight is expressed in the singular. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* is discussing in this passage the individual responsibility of every human being towards his hearing and sight. In front of the Lord *the Most High* accountability is individual; no one will be asked about anybody else. Every person will be questioned only regarding his own actions. Therefore, it is appropriate in this context to talk about hearing and sight in the singular form because each person will be asked solely about his own sight.

Each human being is responsible for their own hearing, sight, and mind in terms of the acquisition of knowledge of the principles upon which their lives are lived. The same criteria apply to what people give using these faculties. It is as though the Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* is saying to the ears, 'Do not hear anything except that which is good and do not learn anything except that which is beneficial'. The message is the same to educators and teachers, they should allow their children to hear only things which encourage them to be virtuous and help improve and enrich their lives.

To the eye, Allah seems to say, 'Look only at lawful and permissible things which do not excite your lusts'. Again, the same advice goes to those responsible for raising up youth and children, 'Shield their eyes from that which arouses lusts and ruins the life'. This is how we should instil in our community the concept of 'correct knowledge' that serves as a basis for the progress of life.

Since you are responsible for your limbs and will be accountable for them, you should never claim to have seen what you have not seen or heard what you have not heard. You should absolutely avoid exposing yourself to the responsibility of giving testimony on matters about which you are unsure.

You must also avoid adopting false causes and building your life based on them. If something is built on corrupt foundations, it follows, naturally, that the outcome will also be corrupt. Conversely, anything built on proper foundations shall yield proper results.

The summation of all this is Allah's statement: 'And follow not (O human) that of which you have no knowledge' (*al-Isra'*: 36). What is the reason for this injunction? Because you will be held accountable for this knowledge as well as the faculties used to acquire it: 'Verily, the hearing, the sight and the heart, [regarding] each of these [you] will be questioned (by Allah)' (*al-Isra'*: 36). Allah then says:

وَلَا تَمْشِ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَرَحًا إِنَّكَ لَن تَخْرِقَ الْأَرْضَ وَلَن تَبْلُغَ الْجِبَالَ طُولًا ﴿٣٧﴾

**Do not strut arrogantly about the earth: you cannot break it
open, nor match the mountains in height [37]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 37)**

The noble verses are still maintaining one steady theme by illustrating the path of balanced interactions within the Muslim community. A balanced community is the one centred upon One God; He is the Absolute Authoritative Master and the Wise Lawmaker.

The one who ponders on all these verses will find that they contain an upright course of life for establishing a balanced, coherent society. This upright course begins with Allah's Words: 'Set not up with Allah any other god...' (*al-Isra'*: 22).

This issue (the oneness of Allah) is the most fundamental and vital aspect of life; all other issues of life cannot be arranged unless they fall under it. Next, Allah divides the community into different groups. Concerning the first group, He enjoins showing kindness to the elders—those who have fulfilled their task in life—as it is time for them to be honoured and to have their favours repaid; so He commanded that parents be treated respectfully and kindly.

Afterwards, Allah turns to the young group—who need protection and care—and gives instructions relating to children. He prohibits killing them out of fear of poverty or need. He also gives special consideration to the orphans

because the orphan is vulnerable and in need of additional support, care, tenderness and compassion.

Then Allah speaks about wealth, life's maintainer. Concerning it, He prescribes moderation and temperance—for the middle group—and prohibits straying away to either of the two extremes, namely extravagance and niggardliness. Next Allah forbids obscenity, particularly sexual intercourse outside marriage (i.e. adultery and fornication), which soils reputations and corrupts lineages. Then, He declares murder and bloodshed as forbidden.

Afterwards, Allah *the Exalted* moves the discussion to how to preserve people's wealth, effort, and hard work. He orders that goods be weighed and measured honestly and accurately, and He prohibits fraud and cheating. Next, He instructs the human being to be intellectually honest; this means that he should refrain from claiming to be knowledgeable about that which he is ignorant so as not to base his life on fallacious grounds.

Can you not see that this delineates the way of life that can ensure the well-being and integrity of the community? The well-being and integrity of the community is consequent upon the well-being and integrity of its members. Basically, the human being is the single most determinant factor in the way life proceeds and progresses, and this is his responsibility as he has been appointed the vicegerent of Allah on earth. For this reason, the Lord *Glorified is He* wants to establish a balanced society, where there are balanced interactions between its members.

The basic element of this balance is equality of all mankind before Allah. We are all His slaves. None among us is related to Allah by birth or lineage. All humans, in Allah's Sight, are equal, like the teeth of a comb⁽¹⁾. The only

(1) Narrated by Ibn `Adi in *Al-Kamil* (vol. 3, p. 248) on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him who narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'People are as equal as the teeth of a comb; one is not superior over another except in how he avoids evil deeds. Man progresses when supported by his brother as a good brother helps and encourages the person to do good. No goodness is expected in the companionship of those who do not like for their companions whatever they like for themselves'. Its chain of transmitters includes Abu Dawud Nakh'i, concerning whom Ibn `Adi said, 'It was agreed that he fabricated hadiths'. However, `Ajiluni attributed it in *Kashf Al-Khafa'* (vol. 2, p. 401) to Ad-Daylami on the authority of Anas and then Sahl ibn Sa'd.

superiority anyone has over anyone else is attained through Allah-fearing piety and good deeds.

If we do in fact have different statuses within the life of this world, it is only an external superficial difference. When you look into these differences, do not look at it from only one particular direction and say, for instance, 'This man is rich and that man is poor, end of story'.

Most people strictly concern themselves with only this perspective when looking at such differences, and neglect all others perspectives. This is incorrect. You must look at other aspects which also play a part in defining a person's life, and observe different elements (that shape a person's well-being in a holistic sense) of the human being's psychology and views. If you look at matters in this way, you will find that the cumulative assets of all human beings are the same. As for the only distinguishing factor, Allah *the Most High* has spoken the truth concerning it, saying: '...in Allah's Eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones who are most mindful of Him ...' (*al-Hujurat*: 13). As long as a faith-based society thoroughly upholds this value, it will be considered socially deviant for any of its members to raise himself to a rank of holiness or status above others. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do not strut arrogantly about the earth...' (*al-Isra*': 37). That is to say do not strut boastfully and proudly, and it could also mean vainly and snobbishly. This is because when someone behaves arrogantly and proudly and, for some reason, thinks of himself as being better than others are, he must be able to assure the continuity of that characteristic which he believes justifies his attitude. This means that the thing that causes him to be arrogant must inherently be a part of him; it never leaves him. However, it is due to Allah's Wisdom that He made everything which might be used as a justification for arrogance an additional gift to humans; and hence, not inherent in their beings.

Human existence—with its various dimensions—from their creation out of nothing to being provided out of nothing, is a gift from Allah that could be taken away any day. So how will it seem if you, after having behaved arrogantly on account of your wealth, are seen by the people as a poverty-stricken person? And likewise, how will it seem if you, after having bragged about your power, are seen by the people as a weak and needy person?

As such, humility and good manners are more befitting for humans. As for pride and superiority, they are strictly reserved for the Creator *the Most High*. How can you attempt to compete with Allah in His Attributes (Pride, Majesty, Supremacy etc.)? The Lord *Glorified is He* has forbidden us to do this. There is none that deserves to be described by the divine attributes of perfection besides Allah *the Exalted*. In fact, acknowledging that true pride and majesty belong to Allah alone stops anyone from being proud with others.

Whoever wishes to see how all creation are equal before the Creator *the Most High*, he should observe the acts of worship. Through them, the inherent humility of all people is manifested. When the call to prayer is given, for instance, you see all people as equals, regardless of whether they are rich or poor, rulers or those who are ruled. The security patrolman standing side by side with the cabinet minister, you see all of them bowing or prostrating; all of them are in a state of humbleness, neediness, and submission before Allah. All of them are the slaves of Allah. Their statuses 'come off' with their shoes as they prepare to pray! In the courtyard of the All-Merciful all stand on equal footing. This equality is witnessed even more clearly during the rites of *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca).

A most outstanding aspect of prayer is that the president or another important figure does not disdain or feel any shame in being seen in such a humble and unassuming position by his subordinates. Why is that the case? The answer is that the humbleness and humility that are shown here are for Allah. And to be sure, such humility to Allah is in fact the very essence of honour, dignity, and stateliness.

Then Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* says: '...you cannot break it (the earth) open, nor match the mountains in height' (*al-Isra'*: 37). We notice in this expression a tone of reproach and reprimand. It is as if the Lord *the Most High* is saying to these arrogant people and those who possess a false sense of superiority, 'How can you go about puffed up with arrogance and conceit concerning that which has been given to you as a gift, although this gift is not inherent in your being? Even with this pompous pretension and self-aggrandisement attitude, none of you can penetrate the earth; on the contrary, it will remain solid and able to withstand your challenges. Keep in

mind, that the earth is the lowest part of the world and is trampled upon by feet daily. Likewise, the mountains, they are a solid inanimate body which will remain above you, and you will never be able to outstrip them in height'. However, we should remember that the Lord *the Exalted* admonishes His honourable believing servants only to protect their honourable status, and so He says: 'Do not strut arrogantly about the earth...' (*al-Isra'*: 37).

At the same time, when Allah *the Exalted* wants to reprimand the people who live with false puffed up pride, He mentions the lowest order of beings: inanimate objects—namely, the earth and mountains. Despite being inferior beings, they may tower above and surpass the human.

A careful observer of the various types of beings in existence: inanimate objects, plants, animals, humans, etc. finds that the human being benefits from all these groups. The inanimate objects benefit the plants. Both the animals and the plants benefit other animals and the human being. Additionally, human beings derive exclusive benefit from the animals. Thus, all types of creatures have been placed to serve the human being. What, then, is your role in this enterprise, O human being? Who is it that you yourself serve? You must have a specific role in the created order and a function in life. If you do not, then the stones and earth have a more purposeful existence than you. It is obligatory on you to search for a mission and specific role within this existence.

Within the philosophy of *Hajj*, there is something that arouses wonder. Inanimate objects, which occupy the lowest order of being, find a lofty place and status. The *Ka'ba* is in itself a stone structure circumambulated by people. In one of its corners, we find the Blessed Blackstone; and, although being a stone, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* allowed us to kiss it. Consequently, people crowd around the Blackstone trying to gain the honour of kissing it or even simply touching it. Undeniably, this is one of the clearest manifestations of slave hood to Allah that exist in creation. The human being sits atop the food chain, he is literally served by the rest of creation; nonetheless, he sees dignity and honour in kissing a stone.

Equally, the uprooting or cutting of plants is forbidden in the Sanctuary in Mecca. By no means do you have the right to extend your hand towards them (with the intention of uprooting or cutting them). Furthermore, hunting

animals is not allowed. These things which serve me most of the time are appointed a time in which I am to serve them and recognize their sanctity. Allah *the Exalted* has planned this to be experienced once in our lifetime to help us remember our natural state and origins. This is designed to prevent the human being from becoming self-deluded concerning the superiority he has inherited within the hierarchy of creatures on the earth. Moreover, this is intended to help him learn that slavery to Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* resonates throughout the universe.

Not in the slightest should the human being violate this open manifestation of worship and slavery that exists within the created order by displaying pride, arrogance, or vainglory. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

كُلُّ ذَٰلِكَ كَانَ سَيِّئُهُ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ مَكْرُوهًا ﴿٣٨﴾

**The evil of all these actions is hateful to your Lord [38]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 38)**

This is referring to all of the previously mentioned instructions and directions which began from Allah's statement: 'Set not up with Allah any other god...' (*al-Isra'*: 22) and the stated issues that we were cautioned against, which aim to preserve integrity and balance within the community, ward off evil and bring about goodness. The evil (*as-sayyi'*) is that which is hateful to Allah *the Exalted*. Allah only hates those matters that go against the principles of obedient servitude to Him. The human being, on the other hand, dislikes anything that goes against his desires or conflicts with his inclinations.

It was said that the previously stated duties and prohibitions were the Ten Commandments revealed to Musa (Moses *peace be upon him*). They are referred to in Allah's statement: 'We inscribed everything for him on the Tablets which taught and explained everything, saying, "Hold on to them firmly and urge your people to hold fast to their excellent teachings..."' (*al-A'raf*: 145).

For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

ذَٰلِكَ مِمَّا أَوْحَىٰ إِلَيْكَ رَبُّكَ مِنَ الْحِكْمَةِ وَلَا تَجْعَلْ
 مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَهًا ۚ آخَرَ فَتُلْقَىٰ فِي جَهَنَّمَ مَلُومًا مَّدْحُورًا ﴿٣٩﴾

**[Prophet], this is some of the wisdom your Lord has
 revealed to you: do not set up another god beside God, or
 you will be thrown into Hell, blamed and rejected [39]
 (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 39)**

The word 'this' in the previous verse refers to the aforementioned injunctions.

As for '*al-hikmah*' (wisdom), it signifies placing something in its proper position to effectuate its proper purpose. This is to keep wisdom prevailing in the community; for wisdom protects it from disorder, foolishness, stupidity, and corruption.

Concerning Allah's statement: 'do not set up another god beside Allah' (*al-Isra'*: 39), one may be led to ask, 'Why is this prohibition being repeated? Did the beginning of this entire section of instructions not start with this same prohibition?'

The Lord *Glorified is He* laid down a flawless way for us; one which will order and arrange our lives. Before beginning to explicate its details, He started with: Allah is one God, without partners or associates. After this, He organized all the different levels and groups in the community. He established the foundations of purity, chastity, and order to preserve the inviolability of lineage. Then He called us to show mutual humility. The basic aim of these instructions is to establish an upright community whose members attain happiness by following the Divine Path.

As such, you should never acknowledge the existence of a god besides Allah. The Lord *Glorified is He* repeated this prohibition: 'do not set up another god beside Allah' (*al-Isra'*: 39) because there will come a time when people will give high regard to the philosophy of some thinkers; consequently, they will adhere to their viewpoints and proceed according to their methodologies. Some will even give preference to these methodologies over the Path of the Lord *the Most High*. They will create confusion in the minds of the people and tempt them away from the true teachings of their religion. In the process, they

will convince them that these ideas are superior to the teachings that Islam preaches. This implies that it is not sufficient to merely believe; you must remain continually on guard against those who might attempt to shake your faith. Hence, do not consider anyone (or anything) other than Allah as your lord; the person you worship besides Allah will work to lure you away from your religion. And the result shall be: 'You will be thrown into Hell, blamed, and rejected' (*al-Isra'*: 39). You will be 'Blamed' because you have committed a blameworthy action, and 'Rejected' means removed and cast far away from Allah's Mercy. This is the recompense in the Hereafter.

As for the one who does not believe in the Hereafter, in order for the people to be able to withstand him in this life, Allah *Glorified is He* allows him to taste some of his punishment in the life of this world. In this sense, Allah *Glorified is He* expedites the punishment of this individual; He punishes him in the life of this world before the Hereafter. This is reflected in the statement of Allah *Glorified is He* '...and he who follows My guidance will not go astray, and neither will he be unhappy. But as for him who turns away from remembering me — verily, he shall have a straightened life...' (*Ta Ha*: 123-124). Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* has mentioned the following in the story of Dhu Al-Qarnayn (the one with two horns): 'Until, when he reached the setting of the sun, he found it [as if it were] setting in a spring of murky water, and he found a people near it. Allah said, "O Dhu Al-Qarnayn, either you punish [them] or treat them with kindness'. He [Dhu Al-Qarnayn] said, "Whoever does wrong, we will punish. Then he will be returned to his Lord, and He will punish him with a terrible punishment"' (*al-Kahf*: 86-87). Allah *Glorified is He* states Dhu Al-Qarnayn as saying: '...we will punish him...' (*al-Kahf*: 87) as Dhu Al-Qarnayn had been given authority in the land and entrusted with the responsibility of preserving social equity; His responsibility even extended to people who did not believe in the Hereafter. If this was not the case, and we postponed the punishment of such people until the Hereafter, they will ruin the lives of countless numbers of men and women; they will be given free-reign to cause much corruption.

For this reason, an oppressive tyrant does not die until Allah *Glorified is He* has requited him for his misdeeds and allowed him to taste the punishment of

the life of this world before that of the Hereafter. The oppressed must see and notice that the end result of oppression is disastrous. At the same time, the oppressed are under Allah's protection and are given support and aid by Him in whatever way He chooses. This holds true to such an extent that if an oppressor knew what Allah *Glorified is He* has prepared for the oppressed, he will withhold his oppression.

Allah says:

أَفَأَصْفَكُمْ رَبُّكُمْ بِالْبَنِينَ وَاتَّخَذَ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنْتِثًا إِنَّكُمْ لَتَقُولُونَ قَوْلًا عَظِيمًا ﴿٤٠﴾

What? Has your Lord favoured you people with sons and taken daughters for Himself from the angels? What a monstrous thing for you to say! [40] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 40)

Some of the polytheists claim that Allah *Glorified is He* has a son. Some from among them assert that 'Isa (–Jesus, the Messiah) is Allah's Son, while others from among them claim that Uzair (Ezra) is Allah's Son. Then there are those of them who say that the angels are Allah's daughters. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* is rebuking all of them: How can you attribute daughters to the Creator *Glorified is He* and you deem it an honour to have sons? This is an inequitable distribution. As Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned elsewhere: 'What — for yourselves [you choose only] male offspring, whereas to him [you assign] the female: lo that is an unfair distribution!' (*an-Najm*: 21-22) That is a dishonest and wrongheaded distribution.

The statement of Allah: 'Has, then, your Lord distinguished you...' (*al-Isra'*: 40) is saying, 'Has He honoured you by choosing and designating sons for you but taken daughters for himself?'

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And yet, they attribute to Him offspring from among some of the beings created by Him...' (*az-Zukhruf*: 15). This explains why, after mentioning their claim, Allah follows with: '...Verily, you are uttering a dreadful saying' [*al-Isra'*: 40]. Essentially, He described their assertion as being extremely ugly and a great slander against Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah *Glorified is He* similarly says in another verse: 'They say, "The All-Merciful has taken unto Himself a son!" Indeed, [by this assertion]

you have put forth something monstrous' (*Maryam*: 88-89). Allah *Glorified is He* then goes on to say:

وَلَقَدْ صَرَّفْنَا فِي هَٰذَا الْقُرْآنِ لِيَذَّكَّرُوا وَمَا يَزِيدُهُمْ إِلَّا نُفُورًا ﴿٤١﴾

We have explained things in various ways in this Quran, so that such people might take notice, but it has only turned them further away [41] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 41)

The word '*sarrafna*' (explained in various, diverse ways) means that Allah *Glorified is He* changes something from one form to another. Allah's statement: '...the change (*tasreef*) of the winds...' (*al-Baqara*: 146) indicates the same meaning of changing from one state to another. This verse uses the word '*tasreef*' (change), which is derived from the word '*sarrafna*'. This means that at times you will see it (the wind) blowing lightly, tranquilly and serenely, and at other times you will see it blowing furiously. The same wind that blows softly can become a destructive cyclone. Winds can come as heralds of good and growth, or they can come as fruitless occurrences which yield no good at all. This idea is indicated in the word '*tasreef*' (change).

The meaning of the statement: 'And, indeed, We have explained [Our message] in various, diverse ways in this Quran' (*al-Isra'*: 41) is specifically directed at effectively dealing with the claims of those who assert that Allah *Glorified is He* has taken children for Himself—as referred to the Quran. He has dedicated a significant number of places (in His book) to treat this topic. Due to its gravity, the Quran posits various treatments for this issue in different places throughout its text. As a result, the mention of this issue occurs again and again in the Quran. At times repetition is in the topic itself, and at other times it occurs in a fashion that resembles a chorus line. The latter can be observed in Allah's statement: 'Then, which of the favours of your Lord will you deny?' (*ar-Rahman*: 13)

Allah's statement: 'but all this only increases their aversion' (*al-Isra'*: 41) means, 'Instead of returning to the correct path by once again accepting (how great Allah is), they increased their aversion, running away (from Allah's Path). We must ask, 'Why is this case?' The answer is that they desired to

retain the 'temporal authority' that had been theirs before the dawn of Islam. We will explain what we are referring to as 'temporal authority'.

If we study the history of legal systems throughout the world, we find that the so-called positive law—secular law that was contrived by human beings—did not appear until sometime later (in the history of legal development). In fact, it developed as the result of the hegemonic influence of the priestly classes. The lawmakers of the period created laws, endorsed them in the name of faith, and subsequently compelled the people to comply with them. Nonetheless, it was observed that sometime after they had given a particular ruling concerning a matter, they used to issue a second ruling for the same matter that contradicted the first one. This resulted in the people turning aside from ecclesiastical law. In its stead they produced the so-called positive law, and this explains how they came to wield what is termed as 'temporal authority'.

To be sure, this temporal authority is what prevented the Jews of Medina from believing in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Indeed, they were fully aware of his description as well as the contents of his message and the time he was coming. When they saw the idolaters of Mecca, they used to say, 'There will come a time when a prophet will come from this land. (And when he will come) We will follow him and subsequently destroy you as the people of 'Ad and Iram were destroyed'. But when they were in fact confronted with this prophet—whom they clearly recognized—they disbelieved in him; this, despite the fact that they were earnestly praying for victory over the disbelievers by his advent.

These are the details concerning Allah's statement in respect to the Jews of Medina: 'And whenever there came unto them a [new] revelation from Allah, confirming the Truth already in their possession—and [bear in mind that] aforetime they used to pray for victory over those who were bent on denying the Truth—whenever there came unto them something which they recognized [as the Truth], they refuse to believe it. But the curse of Allah is on all those who deny the Truth' (*al-Baqara*: 89). In actual fact, the Jews proved to be those who were the most hostile to the message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* despite the fact they were absolutely certain about his truthfulness. Their reason was that accepting this

message meant they will be prevented from exercising the temporal authority that they enjoyed. It will signify the effective end of their domination in the fields of science, economics, and war. All of these things had been firmly in their grasp before Islam.

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ لَوْ كَانَ مَعَهُ آلِهَةٌ كَمَا يَقُولُونَ إِذَا لَا بُدَّغُوا إِلَىٰ ذِي الْعَرْشِ سَبِيلًا ﴿٤٢﴾

Say, 'If there were other gods along with Him, as they say there are, then they would have tried to find a way to the Lord of the Throne' [42] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 42)

That is to say: If there were other deities besides almighty Allah, these deities will seek a means of access to the Owner of the Throne of Power. Allah *Glorified is He* has already treated this issue elsewhere when He said: 'Allah [Himself] bears witness that there is no god but Him' (*Al-'Imran*: 18). This is an unambiguous issue: It is either true or it is something other than true. If it is true then the matter is conclusive. On the other hand, if it is something other than true, there is another god. But if this is the case, where is he? Why do we not hear from him? Perhaps he exists but is unaware of his existence. Or perhaps he is aware of his existence and of this issue, but is reluctant to confront it and articulate his disagreement with the claims of the opposition. Whatever the case may be, if any of the above mentioned scenarios are true, such a 'being' certainly does not deserve to be considered a god. Therefore, as long as Allah *Glorified is He* testifies to His Own Oneness and no one has risen to contest this claim, this matter must be judged as being decisively in His Favour.

The term: 'the owner of the throne' is, in general, not used for anyone besides the one for whom the decisive command is uncontestedly in his hands, after all the fighting and conflict have ceased. Accordingly, the chair or seat of authority is given to him so that he can assume his role upon it.

Seeking a means of access to the Owner of the Throne of Power, as mentioned in this verse under discussion, means that they contest Allah's claim (to the Throne) and want to resist and oppose His Authority. If these 'contenders' to Allah's Throne are victorious, then the matter will be settled.

If, on the other hand, they are defeated, the least that these deities will do is that they will part with that which they have created. This is expressed in the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘Never did Allah take to Himself any offspring, nor has there ever been any deity side by side with Him: [for, had there been any] lo! Each deity will surely have taken what he had created, and they will surely [have tried] to overcome one another’ (*al-Mu'minun*: 91). An alternative meaning of this verse is that: they will strive to find a way to the Throne in order to request Allah’s permission to be counted among His creation and slaves. This explains why Allah *Glorified is He* says in another place: ‘Never does the Messiah feel too proud⁽¹⁾ to be Allah’s slave, nor do the angels who are near unto Him...’ (*an-Nisa*’: 172). He also mentions: ‘Those [saintly beings] whom they invoke are themselves striving to obtain their Lord’s Favour—[even] those among them who are closest [to Him]—hoping for His Grace and dreading His punishment’ (*al-Isra*’: 57). In essence, those whom you have associated with Allah—as exemplified in your statements: Jesus (The Messiah) *peace be upon him* is Allah’s son; Ezra *peace be upon him* is Allah’s son; the angels are Allah’s daughters, etc.—depend on Allah *Glorified is He* for sustenance and seek a means through which to submit to Him. Even the closest of them to Allah—the angels—seek a means through which to demonstrate their submission to Him. This implies that those who do not enjoy the closeness to Allah *Glorified is He* that they do should be even more willing to submit to Him.

Allah *Glorified is He* exalts Himself when He says:

سُبْحَنَهُ وَتَعَالَى عَمَّا يَقُولُونَ عُلُوًّا كَبِيرًا ﴿٤٣﴾

Glory be to Him! He is far above what they say! [43]
(The Quran, *al-Isra*’: 43)

His saying: ‘Glorified is He’ is an absolute renunciation of all that men might say in an attempt to confine Allah’s Essence, Attributes, or Actions. To be sure, His Essence is nothing like yours essence; nor are His Attributes

(1) This is saying, ‘He does not disdain, look down upon, dislike or feel too proud to be Allah’s slave’. Implied within this statement is that he is more than willing to fulfill all of the rights that a master has over a slave (Al-Qamus Al-Qawim 2/287).

anything like your attributes. And for that matter, your actions, as well, bear no resemblance to His Actions. This is because all these vary according to the one who has them or carries them out.

For example, every structure includes pillars, a central foundation, and something to protect them. Although all structures are composed of these elements, one will differ from the other based on the sturdiness and strength of the materials. In the same manner, there must be this range of difference between Allah *Glorified is He* and the creation; between The Lord and the one ruled by Him; between the worshipper and who he worships.

In fact, all things that are thought to be equally distributed among people differ according to the unique qualities that people possess. His saying: 'Sublimely and immeasurably' (*al-Isra'*: 43) indicates that Allah *Glorified is He* is exalted and immeasurably far from what these people are saying. Hence, He said: 'Sublimely and Immeasurably Exalted' because people differ in (their understandings of) exaltedness.

We notice that Allah *Glorified is He* chose to use the expression '*kabir*' (translated 'Sublimely and immeasurably' in the verse, lit. 'big' or 'great') as opposed to '*akbar*' (lit. 'bigger' or 'greater') here. This word choice is most precise. In point of fact, the word '*kabir*' means that everything besides Him is comparatively small, whereas the word '*akbar*' suggests that aside from Him being '*akbar*' (greater) there is someone or something else that might comparatively be described as '*kabir*' (big). The latter suggests that someone or something owns a measure of the greatness—albeit in a comparatively small amount—that He owns. This explains why we say '*Allah Akbar*' when announcing the prayer. The word '*akbar*' (lit. 'Greater') is a valid description of Allah *Glorified is He*, but it is not considered as one of His Attributes. The reason that the call to prayer is issued in this manner is because there are things among the day's activities that can be legitimately described as '*kabir*'—which in this context would mean of great importance or significance—such as performing good deeds and exerting effort to earn one's livelihood. These things are of great importance (*kabir*) but Allah *Glorified is He* is more important (*akbar*). Allah *the Exalted* then says:

تُسَبِّحُ لَهُ السَّمَوَاتُ السَّبْعُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ
بِحَمْدِهِ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ حَلِيمًا غَفُورًا

The seven heavens and the earth and everyone in them glorify Him. There is not a single thing that does not celebrate His praise, though you do not understand their praise: He is most forbearing, most forgiving [44] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 44)

‘Glorifying’ Allah means that you believe that Allah, alone, is the Supreme Deity. Indeed, you do not truly believe in something, i.e. believe that it is awe-inspiring, until you are sure that that which you believe in excels and surpasses you in the characteristic which inspires you with awe. What is more, you will not entrust or commission someone to perform a task (for you) until you are absolutely certain that he is more capable and qualified than you at performing that task.

And if you believe in only One Deity, this means you believe that this One Deity, Allah *Glorified is He* is superior to all others. There is no one who resembles Him; despite the fact that they might be described with the same name that belongs to Him. (We say), ‘Allah is rich’, (and we also say), ‘You are rich’—with the same words. Nonetheless, Allah’s richness is intrinsic and your being rich is acquired—which means that you can be divested of it at any time.

The same could be said in relation to the characteristic of existence. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* exists and you exist. However, the existence of Allah *Glorified is He* has never been preceded by non-existence; not in the slightest, His existence is intrinsic, while your existence can only be described as being contingent—it can terminate at any time.

Fundamentally, this verse is asserting that ‘Glorifying’ Allah *Glorified is He* means you believe that He, alone, is the Supreme Deity. If this was not the case and we likened Him to something else, we will be likening Him to something unworthy of being a deity. ‘Glorifying’ Allah means you say He is exalted, i.e. He has no deficiencies. This is a characteristic that is firmly established as having belonged to Allah *Glorified is He* before there was

anybody present among His creation to exalt Him. Allah *Glorified is He* is glorified and exalted by virtue of His Being and this description was established as His before He brought creation into existence. In the same sense, He was the Creator before He created anything: Just as you say so-and-so is a poet—is he a poet because he composed some verse? Or is he naturally and instinctually a poet, even before he composed any piece?

In reality, the poetic gift is a given talent and a special ability that he possesses. If he did not have this ability, he will not have been able to compose (poetry). Therefore, he is a poet before he composed any poetry. In an identical fashion, all Attributes of Allah *Glorified is He* were present before the advent of creation.

The word ‘glorify’—and all of its derivatives—is recurrent in the Quran; for example, in the opening of the chapter of *al-Isra*, Allah says: ‘Glorified is He’ (*al-Isra'*: 1). The meaning of this statement is that the glorification of Allah *the Most High* was established before He created anybody to glorify Him. The expression is also used in the following verse: ‘All that is in the heavens and on earth has glorified Allah...’ (*al-Hadid*: 1).

The word ‘glorified’ expressed in this verse is in the past tense. This is because glorification is not restricted to the human being; absolutely not, it involves the heavens and the earth as well—and they were created before human beings.

There is also the expression: ‘All that is in heaven and all that is on earth glorify Allah’ (*al-Jumu'a*: 1). In this instance, the word ‘glorify’ is expressed in the present tense to indicate that the glorification of Allah *the Most High* is not something that has passed and is finished; rather, it is perpetual—it will continue into the future without cessation. As such, as long as the glorification and exaltedness of Allah *Glorified is He* were established before He created anybody to glorify Him, and are also carried out by all creatures in the heavens and the earth, it is not legitimate for any person to rebel against Him and upset this order that exists within the creation; that is, none of us should not take part in this chorus of glorification that is recited by all of creation: ‘Glorify your Lord’s Name the Most High’ (*al-A'la*: 1).

As for the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘there is not a single thing’ (*al-Isra*’: 44), this means: Everything that can be considered a thing (praises and glorifies Allah). Of course, the word ‘thing’ could refer to any number of items. In fact, this means that everything that exists glorifies Allah *Glorified is He* and sings His Praises.

Indeed, the scholars have paused at the mention of this verse and commented, ‘The glorification is an indication of how great the creation is, how precisely it is arranged, and the great wisdom behind the creation itself. This should turn our attention to the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* is Exalted (above everything), Supreme and Powerful’. However, they thought this glorification was strictly figurative and not actual set words because they were not able to hear or comprehend it.

However, Allah *Glorified is He* has left us no room to argue about this issue because He says: ‘But you [O men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorification’ (*al-Isra*’: 44). Clearly, there is a glorification that could be described as being imperceptible; however, this is not the intended meaning of the verse. The glorification being referred to in the verse refers to everything glorifying Allah *Glorified is He* in its own ‘language’.⁽¹⁾

The statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘But you [O men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorification’ (*al-Isra*’: 44) indicates that there are different types of glorification. There is the basic, general state of glorifying Allah, which could be described as being figurative, that is carried out by the whole of creation—but there is also the praise, directed to Allah in whom the

(1) In his *Tafsir* (5/3996), *Al-Qurtubi* wrote, ‘The correct approach on this issue dictates that you believe that everything sings Allah’s Praises; additionally, there are a number of narrations that point to this. If this were a figurative glorification, what could the special favour given to Dawud (David) amount to? By this special favour, he is referring to the statement of Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* concerning Dawud: “And we caused the mountains to join Dawud (David) in glorifying the Lord, and likewise the birds: for we are able to do [all things]” (*al-Anbiya*’: 79). This can only refer to actual praise and glorification as articulated by creation. The Hadith of the Prophet contains additional support for that which is expressed in the apparent meaning of the Quran: That everything literally praises Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He*. This makes the verse more worthy of being explained in this manner. And Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* knows best’. This is consistent with what the honourable Sheikh Ash-Sha’rawi has mentioned about this issue.

believers have faith, which is given by all objects in a 'language' that is accessible to them and which we are unable to comprehend. Concerning this second type of glorification, Allah *Glorified is He* has mentioned: 'Each [of them] knows indeed how to pray to Him and to glorify Him' (*an-Nur*: 41). That is, everything that exists knows how to pray to Allah *Glorified is He* and how to glorify Him. The Quran contains verses whose text indicates that each species in existence has a language that can be understood by those of the same species. At times, those who belong to a superior genus (i.e. human beings) vie with each other in order to understand the language of a genus that is inferior to them. But how can we deem it to be farfetched that these languages can exist independent of us simply because we are not able to understand them?

And now, let us look at people themselves. In order to achieve mutual understanding among themselves they will employ the use of a common language. However, they still have different languages. Some among them are unable to understand others. If an English person attempts to use Arabic characters and expressions, no one will be able to understand him. This is because he has not learnt that language.

Language is a social phenomenon. This statement means that the human being is in need of language. To be sure, man lives within a community and needs to reach mutual understanding with its other members to be able to convey his thoughts. Furthermore, he needs to listen to the thoughts of the other members of his community. In order for the successful engagement of this process of thought conveyance, humans must have a language. If the human being lived in solitude, he will have no need for a language; for he will only need to access that which passed through his own thoughts—end of story.

In a real sense, language is not connected with blood, nationality, or place of origin; if you, for example, bring an English child and place him in an Arabic speaking environment, he will speak Arabic. Indeed, language is a social phenomenon that is dependent on hearing and imitation (for its proper acquisition). This explains why if your ear is unable to hear, you will be unable to clearly annunciate your words. The following statement of Allah *Glorified is He* is based on this understanding: 'deaf, dumb and blind' (*al-Baqara*: 18).

So they are dumb and unable to speak because they are deaf, unable to hear. If the human being is not able to hear the expression, he will find it overwhelmingly cumbersome to speak it: What the ear hears, the tongue can articulate.

Therefore, it is through hearing that language is acquired. Everyone hears from his father and from the environment in which he lives. If you follow this issue—as if it were a chain—to its logical conclusion, you will end with Adam *peace be upon him*. This makes us ask an interesting question, ‘From whom did Adam hear the language that he spoke?’ Indeed, the Quran has solved this quandary for us in Allah’s words: ‘And He imparted to Adam the names of all things’ (*al-Baqara*: 31).

Moreover, even with someone speaking Arabic—which is the same language you speak—there is a chance that you might not understand him. A language is a language, but it can do nothing to remedy the misunderstandings that occur due to the different levels of comprehension that exist among its people. One such example of this is seen in the story of the grammarian Abu ‘Alqama. He wanted to indicate how downhearted he was using some unusual, abstruse phrases. Those with him at the time were completely exhausted by his choice of words, but none of them more than his servant, who was unable to stand his incessant lamenting.

It is narrated that on that night, Abu ‘Alqama⁽¹⁾ told his servant, ‘Has the yowl of the fowl preceded us?’ His servant replied, ‘*Zaqfaylim*’. This was the first time Abu ‘Alqama needed to enquire about the meaning of a word. He asked, ‘My boy, what is the meaning of *zaqfaylim*?’ The servant asked, ‘What is the meaning of yowl of the fowl?’ He responded, ‘I was asking if the hens had crowed’. The servant replied, ‘I was saying, “No, they had not crowed!”’

How, then, can we regard as implausible the idea that we are unable to understand the language of other created forms: such as animals, plants, and inanimate objects. Is what Allah *Glorified is He* has informed us of concerning the existence of a language for all created forms not enough to assuage this misgiving? There are languages for other created forms even if we do not understand them. Our doubt is based on our belief that language is restricted

(1) *The story of Abu ‘Aqlama, the grammarian, with his servant*

to that which is articulated with the tongue; but language comprises much more than that.

For instance, there is a sign language, a body language and a Morse code. As such, language is not limited to the tongue. In fact, it comprises all forms of conventional signs that are understood by a set group of people. For example, when the servant is looked at by his employer, that glance is enough for the servant to know what his employer needs. In this case, the glance is a means of conveying information.

Now we are even beginning to hear about dictionaries which record the languages of some animals in order to try to know what their expressions mean. Allah *Glorified is He* has provided us with some signs which indicate that each species within the animal kingdom has a language that is understood by those of the same species. This is understood from His statement: 'And we caused the mountains to join Dawud (David) in glorifying the Lord' (*al-Anbiya'*: 79). The mountains joined Dawud in glorifying Allah *Glorified is He* and singing His Praises just as they have joined others in praising Allah *Glorified is He*. Nonetheless, the objective here is to indicate that they not only joined him in the act of praising Allah *Glorified is He* but also that the mode of their praising was in conformity with his. It was as though they were engaged in a ballad being sung in two-part harmony. Of course, this (duet of sorts) implies that Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* was able to understand them just as they were able to understand him.

In the same manner, (we have) the ant which spoke in front of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*; Sulaiman understood its speech and at one point even beamed laughingly at something it said. In addition to that, Allah *Glorified is He* taught him the verbal communication of the birds. In brief, every species has a language that it uses to praise Allah *Glorified is He* but we are unable to understand how they praise Allah. Our inability to understand their praise can be traced back to the way it is carried out; it is a way of glorifying Allah that is conveyed and expressed in a style that restricts its understanding to those who—on account of their humility—are granted the ability to comprehend it.

Concerning Allah's Exaltedness, He *Glorified is He* has made His Exaltedness unrestricted: all must submit to it. Even the disbeliever is inescapably driven to recognize Allah's Exaltedness. This however, does not strip him of the ability to choose between disbelief and faith. In all, Allah *Glorified is He* desires that His Exaltedness be recognized by everything: The inanimate objects, the plants, the animals, the believers from among the human beings as well as the disbelievers among them. How does this occur?

Allah *Glorified is He* has named Himself by the word Allah. It is a name of the One that has to exist; that is, it is impossible for Him not to exist. Afterwards, He challenged the disbelievers to apply His Name to anything or anybody else when He said: '...Do you know any whose name is worthy to be mentioned side by side with His' (*Maryam*: 65). Despite their tendency to be (uncritically) contrary and stubborn (in refusing the message of Islam) none of them will dare name his child by the name 'Allah'. Obviously, the process of identifying objects by naming them is a matter in which each individual is given a free choice.

This represents Allah's Exaltedness. Even the disbeliever—although in spite of himself—recognizes this quality of Allah *Glorified is He*. As such, it stands as a proof of Allah's Might and Grandeur. Might and Grandeur which are so dissimilar to anything identified with human beings that not even a disbeliever will be bold enough to attempt to assume any of Allah's Qualities. Indeed, although they are decidedly in a state of disbelief, they themselves are not satisfied with disbelief. They are (subconsciously) fearful of Allah's Wrath and Vengeance that might await them if they engage in such a practice. This explains why none of them have been so bold as to (sacrilegiously) name himself by the Name of Allah.

With regards to devotional acts, Allah *Glorified is He* has decided that they be exclusively dedicated to Him; no one is allowed to share this right with Him. This of course implies that no one can (legitimately) dedicate an act of worship to anyone besides Him *Glorified is He*. Nonetheless, for all intents and purposes, people do venerate their fellow human beings at levels that near the worship of Allah *Glorified is He*. Some of them (obsequiously) bend their backs out of submission to others as though they are literally bowing or prostrating.

Some of them praise a dictator; proclaiming that he is unequalled (in his greatness). At times, this exaggeration is allowed to progress until the dictator is regarded as some type of god on earth. Still worse, some of them prostrate (in adoration) to the sun, as the people of Sheba were accustomed to doing. It was the Hoopoe who gave the report on them when he said: 'And I found her and her people adoring the sun instead of Allah' (*an-Naml*: 24). Have we not seen some people who draw near a government official; do they not begin to act deceitfully in order to appease him? He may even spend a lot of money to please this official. Do we not see one of them going to his master's palace every day in order to sign his name in the visitors' book as a way of indicating that he is loyal and obedient to him?

Accordingly, some people believe that certain people have characteristics which are not present in any other person. Likewise, some people are too humble to others as they bow and prostrate to them or flatter them.

But Allah *Glorified is He* has reserved the obligation of Fasting entirely for Himself; it cannot be done for the sake of any one but Him. No one is able to use Fasting as a means of drawing near to someone else. Have you ever seen anyone try to get close to somebody else by Fasting (for their sake)? Moreover, notice how Glorious and Exalted Allah, Himself, is; no one dares to attempt to name himself by Allah's Name.

Returning to the devotional acts (in the same manner), people do not fast for the sake of anyone beside Him. Imagine if you said to someone, 'In order to be closer to you, I will fast this specific day or this specific month'. Naturally, you will expect the person for whose sake you are fasting to sit by your side and guard you; monitoring and inspecting your Fast. It is as though you want him to experience difficulty and hardship in order for you to get closer to him.

This explains why Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned in one of the Qudsi Hadiths, 'Every act of the child of Adam is for him besides Fasting; it is for Me and I will grant the reward for it'.⁽¹⁾ That is to say, 'You can attempt to draw closer to someone other than Me by any means from among the principal

(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his *Sahih* book of authentic Hadiths (1903) and Muslim in his *Sahih* (2/806) from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra, This is a Qudsi Hadith whose source is the Lord Himself.

acts of Islam, but not by Fasting'. Consequently, no one will ever attempt to get closer to someone else by way of voluntarily fasting for his or her sake.

To conclude, this glorification of Allah is overarching and comprehensive proof for all the creation; it unambiguously affirms how great Allah is. This is why we say to the disbeliever, 'You have scornfully rejected faith in Allah'. Unto the disobedient we say, 'You have scornfully rejected (obeying) Allah's commands'. Unto both we say, 'As long as you all are engaged in this scornful rejection of Allah *Glorified is He* at times even proudly displaying the ease with which you are able to out rightly reject and rebel against Him *Glorified is He* why do you not disdainfully reject a disease that you might be afflicted with or death as it "knocks at your door"?'

Why do you not display this disdain in front of the Angel of Death: Tell him, 'I am not going to die today?' These realities indicate that none can stop what Allah has willed for anyone from happening—even the one who does not believe in Him. In actual fact, no one is able to rise up or rebel against what Allah has willed for him.

The same can be said of the disobedient (servant of Allah) when he deviates from the straight path and begins to extend his hand toward others' property—by way of theft, embezzlement or misappropriation of public funds. Allah *Glorified is He* creates ways to make him lose all that he had gained by his unlawful, fraudulent practices. Or he may also lose the money he obtained from lawful means as well. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* spoke the truth when he *peace and blessing be upon him* said, 'Whoever makes his money through dishonest means, Allah will take it from him through calamities'.⁽¹⁾

To recap, glorification of Allah is the 'language' of the entire Universe. Some of it we are able to understand, and some of it we are not—this is the case for all of us except those whom Allah *Glorified is He* allows to understand what is usually hidden. If Allah *Glorified is He* grants His Special Favour to

(1) Cited by Al-'Ajiluni in *Kashf Al-Khafa'* (2/313); Qada'i vouched for its authenticity and mentioned that its chain extended to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when narrated on the authority of Abu Salma Al-Himsi. However, Abu Salma Al-Himsi is classified as a weak narrator and his being a Companion has not been confirmed. He said that he met Subki, but this is incorrect.

someone and thereby teaches him the language of the birds and other animals, as well as plants and inanimate objects, that individual will be able to understand and comprehend them. This is the blessing that He bestowed upon Dawud *peace be upon him* and Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*. As an expression of gratitude for this blessing, Sulaiman *peace be upon him* said: 'My Lord, enable me to be grateful for Your Favour which you have bestowed on me and on my parents' (*an-Naml*: 19).

The statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'And there is not a single thing that does not glorify Him by praising Him' (*al-Isra'*: 44). It is incumbent upon those given knowledge (of the various forms of glorification) to tell us how other beings glorify Allah. To be sure, they are clearly articulated expressions (of glorification), but they are expressed in a language that only those especially chosen by Allah *Glorified is He* can understand.

Allah *Glorified is He* then concludes this verse by mentioning: 'Verily, He is Oft Forbearing, Most Forgiving!' (*al-Isra'*: 44) Indeed, in many instances the human being is completely oblivious of the different phenomena in the universe and its signs which indicate the true nature (of existence). He is in a position to be able to clearly observe the Power of Allah *Glorified is He* and the wonder of His 'Handiwork'—and despite this he is still heedless. In the same manner, he is neglectful of the glorification of Allah that is articulated throughout the Universe. This is why Allah mentioned that He is forbearing; He does not hasten the punishment of the negligent. He also mentioned that He is Oft Forgiving to those who repent and turn back to Him.

This is due to the mercy He shows His slaves. If Allah *Glorified is He* were to cease to show mercy to His slaves, the human being—who is the master of creation—will have a more unfortunate lot than the animals. This is clear if we reflect upon the statement of Allah *Glorified is He* concerning how all the creation glorifies Him: 'Do you not see that to Allah prostrates whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth, and the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the moving creatures and many of the people? But upon many the punishment has been justified....' (*al-Hajj*: 18) Here, before us, are all of the various types of created forms: Inanimate objects, plants, and animals. All of them—without exception—prostrate themselves to Allah

Glorified is He. They prostrate themselves and they glorify Allah *Glorified is He* in unison. The only discrepancy we see in this matter occurs in relation to the human being, the 'ennobled master' of all created forms. But, why do we see this discrepancy within the human being, this willingness to 'break rank' with the rest of creation in its glorification of Allah *Glorified is He*? We respond by stating, 'It is because he is the only creature of Allah *Glorified is He* that has been distinguished with free-will. Allah *Glorified is He* has given him choice and freedom to do or not to do any given act. As for the rest of creation, they are all subjected to instinct and do not exercise any volition'. At this point, someone might say, 'Why did Allah *Glorified is He* not make the human being not have free-will, like the rest of creation?'

To be sure, Allah *Glorified is He* gave the human being volition and free will for a noble reason. The quality of being overpowering invests Allah with the Authority to do what He wants with His creatures. If He *Glorified is He* determines something for one of them, this creature is inexorably bound to that which has been determined for him; he cannot deviate, nor can he differ from it. However, His quality of being overpowering does not stipulate that He should be loved.

As for giving free will, this characteristics demands that He should be loved. Indeed He created you with a choice: You can believe or disbelieve. And despite this, you have still chosen to believe in Him—out of love for Him. You have freely chosen obedience and submission. This is proof that Allah is One Who people love.

By no means should you submit to the idea that the one who disobeys Allah *Glorified is He* does so because Allah *Glorified is He* has pre-ordained for this person to disobey Him. Quite the reverse, the person has chosen disobedience on the basis of the free will that Allah *Glorified is He* has given him. Some have even dared to say, 'Why should the human being be charged as guilty? What is the sin man committed to be the only creature that has been given free will to the exclusion of the rest of the creation?'

If you view this point logically as well as philosophically, you will find that all of creation has free will, not simply human beings. However, the rest of creation chose to submit to Allah's orders. They preferred to allow Allah to completely determine their paths and arrange their existence from the very

beginning. It was the human being who, on the other hand, preferred to be allowed to exercise free will during his life. He said, 'I will be careful; I will sincerely fulfil this responsibility'. This fact is very clear in Allah's statement: 'Verily, We did offer the Trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains: but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet man undertook it—for, verily, he has always been prone to do great wrong and misjudge [matters] out of ignorance' (*al-Ahzab*: 72). The reticence of these created forms to bear the responsibility of free will is evidence of the great knowledge they owned. They refused to bear the Trust because there is a great difference between agreeing to accept a responsibility and actually fulfilling it when it has to be discharged; there is a huge difference in accepting responsibility at a time when your ability to bear it is completely uncertain and a time when you have reason to believe you can discharge it. Indeed, you might assume a responsibility because you are confident in your ability to carry it out but later encounter unplanned circumstances which prevent you from discharging the responsibility.

In many instances, the trust taken on good faith is not notarised or written down—this is well known. As a result, this trust often becomes the domain of trickery and fraud. The one assuming the trust is the sole guarantor of the legal rights of the one granting the trust. At times, the former is unable to fulfil the terms of the trust and ends up succumbing to the moral temptations of fraud and deception—life's problems sometimes overpower men.

A person can guarantee his ability of fulfilling a trust when he agrees to accept it, but he cannot guarantee he will be '*capable*' of fulfilling the trust when it has to be discharged (he may or may not be able to discharge the responsibility). This explains why the other created forms opted to allow Allah to completely determine their paths and arrange their existence. As for the human being, he said, 'I have a mind; I can use discretion in order to measure the desirability of certain actions over others'. In this manner, the human being wronged himself. He cannot guarantee he will still have these abilities when it is time to fulfil the responsibility that he so willingly assumed. He made this assertion without giving due consideration to the possibility of a change occurring in his circumstances.

In essence, the rest of the created order is not grudgingly subjected to what Allah has determined for them; absolutely not, they preferred this

situation (allowing Allah to completely determine their paths) as their lot and chose it. Likewise, the human being does not have free will in spite of himself; rather, it is the outcome of his choice and preference.

Allah says:

وَإِذَا قَرَأْتَ الْقُرْآنَ جَعَلْنَا بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ حِجَابًا مَسْتُورًا ﴿٤٥﴾

[Prophet], when you recite the Quran, We put an invisible barrier between you and those who do not believe in the life to come [45] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 45)

Allah *Glorified is He* arranges certain things in preparation for something else, and creates circumstances whose purpose is to serve as a catalyst or to be something like an introduction for future events of greater importance. The idolaters of Mecca did not leave any stone unturned, nor were they aware of any stratagem that could be used to harm or punish Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* except that they pursued it to its full extent. Nonetheless, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not surprised by this and it did absolutely nothing to decrease his resolve. Why? Because he was expecting all of this abuse and he had already undergone experiences that granted him sufficient strength to combat these calamities.

In essence, nothing startled Prophet Muhammad because he knew how the situation will develop even before he was sent as a Prophet. When he was visited by Angel Gabriel *peace be upon him* for the first time in the cave, he returned to Khadija *may Allah be pleased with her* frightened. She went with him to her cousin, Waraqa ibn Nufal, who consoled him by informing him that he had been contacted by the bearer of Heavenly Revelation. He also told Prophet Muhammad that he *peace and blessings be upon him* will be the heavens' emissary to the earth, and that he was the prophet of the nation. During the course of his conversation, Waraqa ibn Nufal said, 'I wish [I was young enough] to be alive when your people forcibly expel you'. Prophet Muhammad responded, 'Will they forcibly expel me?'⁽¹⁾ His response was foreboding, 'No man has ever

(1) Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in *Dala'il An-Nubuwwa* (2/139-140) from a tradition that was narrated on the authority of Mohammad ibn Nu'man ibn Bashir. It was cited by Ibn Hisham in the *Biography of Prophet Muhammad* that he compiled (1/238). Its text=

come with that which you are bringing without becoming the object of (his people's) animosity. If I see that day, I will aid you with all that I have'.

At heart, Allah *Glorified is He* fortified Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* against the unfolding events of the future for the Prophet to be prepared for what will happen. There was nothing that could surprise him and potentially lead to a break down. Allah allowed Prophet Muhammad to taste the proper amount of the disease (to protect him from future adversities) before the difficulties actually came. Again, this was only done for Prophet Muhammad to have a sufficient amount of resistance to the adversities and be certain of the impending Help of Allah *Glorified is He* no matter how grim or constricting the circumstances he *peace and blessing be upon him* and his companions were confronting may have been.

But with regards to those who do not believe in the Hereafter, as long as this is their view, the life of this world is the only thing they have. It represents their only chance. This is why they are very obsessive in their quest to fulfil all of their desires in it; they spare nothing. If the believer postpones satisfying some of his passions and desires in the life of this world because he is awaiting satisfaction in the Hereafter, for what are the disbelievers postponing the fulfilment of their desires?

This means that the point that has made them very desirous of this world and its fleeting pleasures is the fact that they do not believe in the Hereafter.

Consequently, if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* comes with a way that brings the movement and progress of humanity into conformity with the rest of the Universe, it must inevitably agitate these disbelievers who are desirous over the fleeting pleasures of this world and their worldly positions. They will oppose this message by resisting Prophet Muhammad himself and the Way that he promotes. They will resist the Messenger himself by attempting to cause him harm, and they will resist the Way and Message

= includes Waraqa saying, 'I swear by the One in whose hands my soul lies, you are the prophet of this nation. The great conveyer of Divine Revelation that visited Moses *peace be upon him* has come to you. They will declare you to be a liar; they will do you great harm; they will drive you out and ultimately take up arms against you. If I live to see that day, I will strive to benefit the cause of Allah to the utmost'.

that he promotes by attempting to discourage people from it. Did Allah not relate what the disbelievers used to say when they saw anyone who was positively predisposed to Islam: 'Do not listen to this Quran, but make a noise [when it is recited], so that you might gain the upper hand!' (*Fussilat*: 26). Their saying: 'Do not listen to this Quran' (*Fussilat*: 26) is a testimony to the fact that they recognized the Truth of the Quran and that it had a great capacity to reach the heart and to affect it. If this wasn't the case, why will they say something like this regarding it? Their saying: '...make a noise [when it is recited]...' (*Fussilat*: 26) means: make a clamour and create any distraction for the Quran not to reach the ears of the people. Their actions establish that they were confident in Prophet Muhammad's trustworthiness and in the truthfulness of his message. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to go to the *Ka'ba* and sit beside it, quietly reciting the verses of the Quran, the notables among the disbelievers of Mecca used to purposely listen to the Quran and relish its beauty and eloquence.⁽¹⁾

Allah's statement tells us: 'And when you recite the Quran, We put between you and those who do not believe in the Hereafter a veil which is concealed' (*al-Isra'*: 45). It is related⁽²⁾ that Abu Jahl, Abu Sufyan, Abu Lahab and Um Jamil used to follow Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and secretly listen to his recitation with the purpose of seeing what it said and harming Him *peace and blessings be upon him*. As a result, Allah *Glorified is He* used to deafen their ears for them not to be able to hear the Quran. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* used to recite, but

(1) *Ibn Hisham cites this story in his compilation of the Biography of Prophet Muhammad (1/315). Abu Sufyan, Abu Jahl, and Akhnas ibn Shariq left (their houses) one night to listen to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him while he prayed in his home at night. None of them knew where the other two were until the break of dawn, at which time they left. They met up on the main road and followed one another. They repeated this three nights in a row.*

(2) *According to what Al-Qurtubi narrated in his Tafsir (5/3997), Az-Zujaj said, 'This was revealed in reference to a people who used to cause Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him harm when he used to recite the Quran. These were: Abu Jahl, Abu Sufyan, Nadr ibn Harith, Um Jamil the wife of Abu Lahab and Huwaytib. Allah Glorified and Exalted is He used to cover Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him from their sight when he was reciting the Quran. They used to pass by the Prophet without seeing him.*

they were not able to hear anything, and consequently they were forced to turn away seething with hatred.

It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* wants this experience to prepare Prophet Muhammad for something more important. That (more important) event is represented in what happened to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on the night of the Migration; the night that they (the disbelievers) hatched a plot to assassinate him by striking him with one collective blow. Allah's Care protected Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; it is as though it said to him, 'Go out and walk in front of them, and do not be scared. Indeed, the One Who made you able to recite (the Quran) and Who placed a barrier between you and them for them not to be able to hear you is the One Who will cause blindness to descend upon their eyes for them to not be able to see you'.

Despite the fact that they had meticulously planned this conspiracy, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not depart into their midst holding his breath out of fear. Quite the reverse, He *peace and blessings be upon him* departed saying, 'May your countenances be disfigured'.⁽¹⁾ He did not fear being discovered by them, but even more than this, he took a handful of dirt and threw it in their faces. This clearly indicates how certain he was that he was being aided and supported.

With regards to Allah's statement: 'a veil which is concealed' (*al-Isra'*: 45), a veil is something that blocks one from perceiving something. If it is for the eye, it prevents vision. If it is for the ear, it prevents hearing. The word '*mastura*' (which is concealed) is a passive particle which refers to the veil, which prevents them from hearing or seeing, itself being covered. If the veil itself is covered, what do you think about what is behind it? Without doubt, the mind will immediately think of a physical veil when this verse is read.

(1) *This statement of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him has come down to us through the Hadith about the Migration on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas which was narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (1/368). Similarly, it has been narrated in connection with the Expedition of Hunayn in Sahih Muslim (1777) in a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Iyas ibn Salma from his father. It was also narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (1/286) and Ad-Darimi in his Sunnan (2/219) from the Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Abu 'Abd Ar- Rahman Fahri.*

However, the veil that Allah *Glorified is He* is mentioning is symbolic; no one is able to see it. This is the same as what is referred to in Allah's words: '...raised the heavens without any supports that you can see...' (*ar-Ra'd*: 2). If He had just said, 'without any supports', without any more information, He will have negated the presence of supports in the sky—and this will be the end of the story. In that case, we will have simply classified it under Allah's statement: 'Verily, it is Allah [alone] who upholds the celestial bodies...' (*Fatir*: 41). We will have concluded that the matter depended on Allah's Power and hence without the presence of any supports to uphold the sky.

Nevertheless, His mentioning '...that you can see...' allows us to correctly say, 'without supports'; and this is what you all see in the sky. Indeed, we may look here and there, but we will not find the canopy of the sky being upheld by any supports. Or we can also conclude, 'There are supports in the sky, but we are unable to see them'. They are allegorical supports. Your mind does not start thinking of the pillars we humans erect which are made of reinforced steel, marble or iron.

In this respect, the delusion of the human being is effectively crushed. He must realise that he is only capable of perceiving that which Allah *Glorified is He* allows him to perceive. Additionally, he must realise that the senses that he utilizes for perception might cease to perform their proper functions any time. This does not imply that your senses are functioning and will always continue to function but without the ability to do as you choose. On the contrary, Allah *Glorified is He* grants the senses the ability to function in the first place, and He is likewise able to strip them of that ability.

It is the Power of Allah *Glorified is He* which makes this Universe 'tick'. It commands each object to perform its specific function in life and if Allah wills, it can disable any object for it to be unable to perform this function. This is the reason why we reject the philosophy of deism: Namely, that Allah *Glorified is He* exercised His authority in creation only on one occasion: when He created the laws and principles of nature. (According to this philosophy) It is these (immutable) laws and principles which govern the outcome of affairs in life and make it 'tick'.

In the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* we find that he was travelling with his army while being pursued by Pharaoh and his forces. This went on until he reached the seashore. At that time he had the sea before him and Pharaoh behind him, this prompted his companions to proclaim: 'Behold, we shall certainly be overtaken [and defeated]' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 61). 'Where can we find refuge', they said, 'The sea is in front of us and the enemy is at our backs?' This is a logical concern when surveying the issue from the vantage point of the human being. However, Musa *peace be upon him* was operating on quite a different level. Allah recounts what he said: 'He replied, "Nay indeed! My Lord is with me, [and] He will guide me!"' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 62) Did Musa *peace be upon him* say this because he had a hidden store of human knowledge? Of course not; it was the confidence that he had in his Lord which spurred him to say this. In that manner, he placed the matter in the Hands of the Creator. Allah said to Prophet Musa *peace be upon him*: 'Thereupon we inspired Musa (Moses) thus, "Strike the sea with your staff!"—whereupon it parted, and each part became like a huge, firm mountain' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 63) Allah *Glorified is He* defied the laws of nature which govern the liquidity and volume of water for Musa. The water solidified and became like mountains, while the path of the sea became dry land. This enabled Musa *peace be upon him* and his people to cross the sea and pass safely to the other side. The constriction of their souls was relieved by being delivered safely. After this occurred, Musa *peace be upon him* prepared to strike the sea with his staff for it to return to its normal state. This was to prevent Pharaoh from crossing and reaching him; however, Allah *Glorified is He* commanded him to leave it as it was: 'and leave the sea undisturbed⁽¹⁾: for verily, they [Pharaoh and his men] are a host destined to be drowned!' (*ad-Dukhan*: 24) As soon as Pharaoh and his men had descended into the sea and all of them were on the seabed, Allah *Glorified is He* released the water and let it return to its normal state following the laws of nature which govern its liquidity. It completely covered Pharaoh and his men. This was a sign from among the signs of Allah *Glorified is He*; it was clear evidence of His Awesome Power. If Allah *Glorified is He* so chooses, He

(1) That is to say, 'Leave the sea calm for them to descend into it, confident that they too could cross' [*Al-Qamus Al-qawim* 1/279].

Glorified is He can rescue you or destroy you with the same object. It was also clear evidence that He has control of His creation. It is not as some say, 'The laws and the principles of nature affect and regulate creation'. Every miraculous happening that has occurred throughout the history of mankind were examples of the laws and principles of nature which govern existence being defied.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَجَعَلْنَا عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ أَكِنَّةً أَنْ يَفْقَهُوهُ وَفِي آذَانِهِمْ وَقْرًا وَإِذَا ذُكِرَتْ
رَبُّكَ فِي الْقُرْءَانِ وَحْدَهُ، وَلَوْ عَلَىٰ أَنْ يَدَّبَّرَهُمْ نُفُورًا ﴿٤٦﴾

We have put covers on their hearts that prevent them from understanding it, and heaviness in their ears. When you mention your Lord in the Quran, and Him alone, they turn their backs and run away [46] (The Quran, *al-Isra*: 46)

The word '*akinnah*' in the verse refers to a covering. The Quran tells us they admitted that they had a covering or veil that covered their hearts and which made their hearts unaware and heedless; Allah says: 'And they say, "[It is as if] Our hearts are under coverings [concealed] from that to which you invite us, and in our ears is a deafness, and between us and you is a partition, so do [what you will]; indeed, we are doing [what we will]"' (*Fussilat*: 5). All that exists is part of Allah's creation, and the human being is the master among creation; he is the vicegerent of Allah and he is cherished and nurtured by the Creator. This is part of man's very nature; everyone is cared for by the Lord and no one can avoid His Care. It makes no difference, even if he is a disbeliever, he will remain basking in the gifts and bounties that are a result of Allah's Care and Lordship. The disbeliever is not prevented from this gift on account of his disbelief, just as the disobedient are not prevented from this gift on account of their disobedience. Rather, it is as Allah *Glorified is He* described: 'To each We give freely on all—to these and to those—from the bounties of your Lord. And never have the bounties of your Lord been restricted' (*al-Isra*: 20). Previously, we mentioned the difference between the bounties Allah gives due to Him being Our Lord and which are represented in life's enumerable blessings, and the bounties Allah gives due to Him being the One

Who is worshipped and which consist of Allah giving responsibility to the human being. The latter implies the existence of a worshipper and an object that is worshipped, and the orders, 'Do' and 'Do not do'.

Therefore, the bounties Allah gives as He is Our Lord are general and applicable to everyone, at all times. The duty of the human being is to stop, reflect, and ponder over these blessings that come to him without the need to expend any effort or exertion. This sun, that earth, and the atmosphere, does he have any power over them? Do they perform their respective functions because man has ordered them to do this? Indeed, they are the first of the blessings that Allah *Glorified is He* has granted the human being and subjected to his usage by His Power. Do not these blessings call for faith in the One Who gives them?

Earlier we cited a parable that proved the Creator's Existence by taking into account what He has placed in the Universe of natural phenomena and signs; it is the parable of a man stranded in the desert. He is stranded for such a long time that he begins to approach his demise. Surprisingly, in these seemingly bleak moments, he finds a table outspread with the choicest and most select food and drink. Will this miraculous occurrence not cause him to think about where this food and drink came from before he extends his hand toward the table to start eating? This is like the disbeliever who is basking in the Favour and Blessings of Allah *Glorified is He*. He has arrived in this Universe and (miraculously) found it amenable to his wishes and suitable for him to live on; it is like a hospitable host that gives everything he needs for his livelihood. This should have made him think: He must take the blessings not on their own merit, but as evidence that there is One Who gives and arranges them.

Allah *Glorified is He* does not prohibit his Divine Blessings from the one who disbelieves. Quite the reverse, indeed, as soon as the disbeliever becomes resolute and firm in his disbelief, Allah closes his heart and aids him in acquiring what he desires. In fact, He gives him more of what the disbeliever loves, as He has mentioned: 'In their hearts is a disease and so Allah lets their disease increase...' (*al-Baqara*: 10). In essence, Allah's saying: 'for, over their hearts, We have laid veils' (*al-Isra'*: 46) is not how Allah *Glorified is He*

acts at first. Absolutely not, it is a result of the disbelief that the disbelievers, themselves, love, and that they say concerning themselves, 'Our hearts are veiled'. Allah is simply responding to them by granting them what they want and sealing their hearts for their disbelief to become stronger. As long as they love this for themselves, We will give them more of it. Allah *Glorified is He* then moves on to say: 'lest they understand it (the Quran)' (*al-Isra'*: 46). That is: so they do not understand the Quran. Indeed, Allah does not want them to understand the Quran in spite of themselves, but rather, He wants them to willingly understand it while their hearts are content, submitting to the evidence because they are truly convinced. Allah does not desire that our outward forms feign submission to him; He desires that our hearts be imbued with sincere reverence for Him. If this was not the case, and He did, in fact, simply desire a hollow submission that we could perform with our bodies, none of us will have ever been able to deviate from His Path or will be able to prevent himself from complying with the Orders of Allah *Glorified is He*. In such a case, all will submit to His Orders and be completely subjected to His Will.

In the chapter of *ash-Shu'ara'*, the Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Perhaps [O Muhammad] you will kill yourself with grief because they do not become believers. If We willed, We could send down to them from the sky a sign to which their necks will bend in humility' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 3-4). In this case, the necks are bowed down in humility, not the hearts. To be sure, you can subdue the body of your enemy and compel him to say specific words and do particular actions; however, you will never be able to conquer his heart and make him love you. Basically, Allah wants the hearts; He wants them to be in a state of obedience, but an obedience born out of love and free choice. In terms of the disbelievers we have been discussing, they chose for their hearts to be veiled. This is what they love and their hearts were satisfied with disbelief; consequently, Allah increased their disbelief.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and in their ears deafness' (*al-Isra'*: 46). The intended meaning here is that they are unable to hear anything beneficial. But what is the benefit that can be gained from hearing? Language is a means (of communication) shared by the speaker and the listener. By way of language, thoughts and concepts are exchanged with the goal of effectuating a

purpose. If someone listens (to something) but gains no benefit, his hearing does not avail him at all; he might as well be deaf.

Concerning the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'And when you mention your Lord alone in the Quran, they turn back in aversion' (*al-Isra'*: 46), we may ask, 'Why do they turn their backs in apparent aversion?' They only do this because you came to them with something which frightens and disturbs them. By Allah (the case is), if faith in Allah was not something that is in harmony with the innate predisposition of man, even down to his very physical makeup, will these people be afraid to remember Him? What is it that they fear when they claim not to believe in Allah and do not even accept He exists? In other words, how can this fear of theirs be explained as anything but the fear of being overtaken by their own innate feelings; that instinctual sense that they have attempted to obscure through heedlessness? Indeed, if Allah *Glorified is He* is mentioned in their presence, they flee in fear and trepidation.

The Lord then continues by saying:

نَحْنُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يَسْتَمِعُونَ بِهِ إِذْ يَسْتَمِعُونَ إِلَيْكَ وَإِذْ هُمْ نَجْوَى
إِذْ يَقُولُ الظَّالِمُونَ إِنْ تَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا رَجُلًا مَسْحُورًا

**We know best the way they listen, when they listen to you
and when they confer in secret, and these wrongdoers say,
'You are only following a man who is bewitched' [47]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 47)**

Nothing on earth or in heaven eludes Allah. This is a reality that should be taken to heart and into consideration by the disbelievers. Actually, they should thoroughly reflect on this fact as it will guide them to having faith in Allah. To be sure, Allah *Glorified is He* informed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about them by saying: 'And [they] say to themselves, "Why does Allah not punish us for what we say?" Sufficient for them is Hell, which they will [enter to] burn, and wretched is the destination.' (*al-Mujadala*: 8) They must reflect deeply upon this statement. Bear in mind, they said these words to themselves, and not to anyone else. If that was the case, who informed Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of these words of theirs, words that

were never mentioned aloud? Who told him what they had said? Does this revelation of their inner thoughts not summon them to believe in Allah?

Returning to the verse in the chapter of *al-Isra'*, we say: since the Lord *Glorified is He* knows every minute detail of everything, nothing is able to evade or escape Him; He is fully aware of the following: First, He is aware that they listen to you (Muhammad). Second, He is aware that they gather in secret groups. Third, He is aware that they say these words to the evildoers; in other words, they first listen (to what is said) then converse secretly among each other in their secret groups, and finally tell other evildoers.

They say that this verse was revealed to match the deep and abiding love the Arabs had for language in general coupled with a particular obsession for different well-organized figures of speech. This explains why the nature of the miracle given to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was the same type as the specific talent his people had, for it to be a more suitable challenge (to produce a verse like it) for their expertise. This is the manner in which Allah *Glorified is He* chooses appropriate miracles for every Messenger.

At that time, the Arabs had elaborate forums dedicated to oratory and eloquence. People that were noted for their skill at composing poetry, for their eloquence and for their ability to express themselves adeptly used to gather at these forums. During the seasons of the Great Pilgrimage (*Hajj*), all of the linguistic enthusiasts used to pour into Mecca. All of them were familiar with the purity of the language of the Arabian Peninsula and its various literary styles. This was the background that encouraged them to listen to the Quran; given the finely tuned ear and the natural linguistic dexterity they possessed, they ardently loved its clear mode of exposition. The only problem (for them) was that the Quran contained demands and responsibilities that they will not be able to fulfil. Furthermore, it will decisively end the existing political status quo that they were accustomed to live with.

For these reasons they behaved arrogantly and stubbornly; their stance could be personified as a quizzical glance at the invitation to believe. This was the stance they adopted despite the fact that they were naturally impressed by the clear detailed exposition of the Quran and its eloquence.

It is related that some of the prominent figures, such as Nadr ibn Harith, Abu Sufyan and Abu Lahab, crept away after the people who had said, 'Do not listen to the Quran!' had slept. Each one of them went secretly to Prophet Muhammad's house to listen to the recitation of the Quran. How could they prevent themselves from listening to a form of oratorical address so magnificent in its style? Indeed, it was enough that they had already restrained their feelings and their hearts from being moved by this Quran. On their way back from these nightly walks, they used to meet one another by chance; and of course they used to ask each other what they were doing. On one occasion, they lied to each other (concerning the reasons they did not accept the Quran), mentioning baseless reasons. But on another occasion, they acknowledged the deep love of listening to the Quran that had been planted in their hearts.⁽¹⁾

Allah's saying: 'We are fully aware of how they listen to it' (*al-Isra'*: 47) refers to their state of mind when listening to the Quran; namely, that they were in a state of amazement when they listened to it. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'when they listen to you and when they are [being] secretive, conversing privately' (*al-Isra'*: 47). The word '*najwa*' (being secretive, conversing privately) used to describe these disbelievers is related to the word '*al-tanaji*' which refers to secret conversations. This phrase therefore means, 'We are well aware of how they listen to you'; and describing the disbelievers are '*najwa*' implies that they conversed secretly all the time.

Next, we are presented with the third description of these disbelievers: 'when the wrongdoers say, "You follow nothing but a man who is bewitched"' (*al-Isra'*: 47). This is how they used to describe Prophet Muhammad to others. Audaciously, they accused Prophet Muhammad of practicing witchcraft. They also accused him of being insane, of being a poet and another time they accused him of being a fortune-teller. These are all truly invalid accusations that have no proof to back them up. If anything at all, it is proof of how stupid their views were.

The word '*mashuran*' (bewitched) comes from the word '*magic*' which refers to creating the impression that something is happening when, in fact, it

(1) *Ibn Hisham cited this story in his account of the Biography of Prophet Muhammad (1/315).*

is not, or that something is being said when, in fact, it is not being uttered. In other words, it is the ability to divert people's attention away from the real state of affairs. As for the true state of matters, they are permanent and unchanging.

This explains why we say, 'The miracle of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* resembled magic, but it was not magic'. To be sure, that which took place during that miraculous event was real, and not a form of highly deceptive magic. With regards to the staff being transformed into a snake and thereupon beginning to devour the ropes and sticks of the magicians, this actually took place; it was not simply an illusion. Nonetheless, as long as the miracle resembled magic, the people thought it was magic, especially in light of the fact that the Quran proclaimed concerning Pharaoh's magicians: 'They cast a spell upon the people's eyes' (*al-A'raf*: 116). In a separate verse, the Quran declares: 'By virtue of their sorcery, their [magic] ropes and staffs seemed to him to be moving rapidly' (*Ta Ha*: 66). Essentially, reality is a constant and does not change. This implies that the magician saw their staffs as just that: staffs. The captivated on-looker, on the other hand, saw a serpent. But concerning Musa *peace be upon him* there is no semblance between his actions and those of the magicians. The Lord *Glorified is He* affirms this for us; He makes it clear that what happened to Musa was nothing like the magic and sorcery the magicians were practicing, as can be seen in Allah's conversation with Musa. Allah said: 'Now, what is this in your right hand, O Musa (Moses)?' (*Ta Ha*: 17) In reply to this, Musa *peace be upon him* spoke at length (concerning his mission) because from all the people, no one loved to talk to his Lord more than Musa. He answered Allah, saying: 'It is my staff; I lean on it and with it I beat down leaves for my sheep' (*Ta Ha*: 18). At this point, Musa *peace be upon him* started to feel as though he is being a little long-winded, and therefore in an effort to be concise, he said: 'and I have many other uses for it' (*Ta Ha*: 18). This was the extent of his knowledge about the staff he was carrying. However, Allah *Glorified is He* then told us He was going to give it other properties: 'He (Allah) said, "Throw it down, O Musa!" So he threw it—and lo, it was a snake, moving rapidly!' (*Ta Ha*: 19-20) Was it an optical illusion? Did Musa *peace be upon him* see it as a serpent while it was actually a staff? Or did it actually become a serpent? In actual fact, it became

a real serpent. This is evidenced by the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'and in his heart Musa became apprehensive' (*Ta Ha*: 67). Indeed, Musa *peace be upon him* will not have been apprehensive unless his staff had become an actual serpent. Then His Lord reassured him: '[But] We said, "Fear not! Verily, it is you who shall prevail!"' (*Ta Ha*: 68) This explains why the magicians, upon seeing what the staff of Musa *peace be upon him* performed, were certain that it was not magic. On the contrary, (they knew that) it was something clearly outside the realm of magic and magicians. And they knew that what happened was beyond Musa's individual capabilities. As a result, they professed their belief in the Lord of Musa *peace be upon him* the only One Who will have been capable of performing that kind of miracle.

To continue with the verse under discussion we say Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'when the wrongdoers say, "You follow nothing but a man who is bewitched"' (*al-Isra'*: 47) that means: someone who has been bewitched by another person. This is the speech of the evildoers; those who desperately attempted to make up any accusation, from here and there, against Prophet Muhammad. On a different occasion, they mentioned that he himself was a magician. Allah *Glorified is He* stated: '[But] the disbelievers say, "Indeed, he is clearly [nothing but] a magician"' (*Yunus*: 2).

One time, you said Prophet Muhammad was a magician. And yet another time, you said he himself was bewitched. This illustrates how confused and obstinate you were. If he is a magician, you know many magicians, so why do you not confront Prophet Muhammad using magic that is similar to his, as you claim? Or, why did he not cast a spell on you, just as you allege he cast a spell on the others, bringing this struggle to a decisive end? Moreover, is it possible for a magician to be bewitched?

On the other hand, if he was, in fact, bewitched as you claim, that is to say: someone had cast a spell on him, did you ever hear anything he said which was out of step with reality and therefore indicated that he was bewitched? Have you heard him say the senseless drivel that bewitched persons are known to say? Fundamentally, these accusations are lies, all of which are demonstrably false; they contain no shred of truth. This is proven by the fact that you rejected his call, but he (Prophet Muhammad) did not harm you.

When they were not able to substantiate this allegation, they went to another extreme. They said that he was a poet. O Arabs! O possessors of linguistic brilliance and unmatched eloquence! We do not expect this from the likes of you. Is someone of your linguistic stature not able to distinguish between poetry and prose? The Quran possesses a self-contained style unique to itself: It is not poetry; it is not prose; it is not rhyme; it is not composition. It is unique and has its own style.

For this reason, we find that linguists divide speech into two categories: Divine Speech and human speech. Human speech can be further divided into poetry and prose. As for Divine Speech, the Speech of Allah *Glorified is He* it is completely exempted from any form of classification because it belongs to a class of its own; it is distinct from all other forms of speech.

If you were, for instance, to read any literature, you will, undeniably, recognize the poetry from the prose. Your ear will notice the difference between the two distinctive styles. However, this is not the case in terms of the Quranic style. You read its verses, and you are struck by its harmony. You do not even notice that within the text you sometimes move from prose to poetry or from poetry to prose.

To put it succinctly, the Quran contains an original and self-contained style; it should not be referred to as poetry or prose. This issue is not at all confusing for an Arab who is well trained in his language, in both poetry and prose—especially someone capable of distinguishing superb literature from mediocre scripts.

Allah then says:

أَنْظِرْ كَيْفَ ضَرَبُوا لَكَ الْأَمْثَالَ فَضَلُّوا فَلَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ سَبِيلًا

See what they think you are like! But they are lost and cannot find the right way [48] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 48)

At the mention of this verse, you should really be astounded by the level of the disbelievers' stubbornness. First they said concerning the Quran, 'It is a work of sorcery'. Then they said, 'It is a work of poetry'. At different times they described Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a poet, a soothsayer and finally a magician.

It is known that the Divine Message contains three elements: the One Who sends the Message, Who is Allah *Glorified is He*; the Messenger, who is Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; and that which is sent, which is the Quran. The disbelievers stubbornly refused to accept these three. Worse than that, however, is that their refusal gave them the impetus to tell lies and circulate falsities about Allah, His Messenger, and His Book. Previously, we discussed the violations they made against Allah's Divinity and their stance in relation to Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*.

One example is mentioned in Allah's saying: 'And they say, too, "Why was this Quran not bestowed from on high on some great man of the two cities?"' (*az-Zukhruf*: 31) In terms of the issue of faith in general, their position was explained in the following verse: 'And they say, "O Allah! If this indeed be the Truth from You, then rain down upon us stones from the skies, or inflict [some other] grievous suffering on us!"' (*al-Anfal*: 32) Is this a supplication that a rational person will ever say? Instead of saying, 'Guide us to the Truth', they prefer death to attentively listening to the Quran. This clearly indicates how arrogant and stupid they were when dealing with the Book of Allah.

That is why the Lord *Glorified is He* out of His love for His Messenger Muhammad and His desire to raise his status, even among the disbelievers, responded to their hollow claims and consoled the heart of His Messenger. He relieved Prophet Muhammad of his suffering when He said: 'We indeed know the grief which their words cause you' (*al-An'am*: 33). This is referring to their intermittent accusations that he was a magician, a soothsayer, a poet and was insane: 'It is not you that they say are untruthful, but it is the verses of Allah that the wrongdoers reject' (*al-An'am*: 33). That is, the problem does not concern you, Muhammad. Even in their disbelief, they do not really believe you are a liar—they do not have the audacity to believe that; the truth is they do not really believe the accusations they have made against you. The real problem is that they reject My [Allah's] verses. Moreover, all of their reactions in relation to Allah's Divinity, the issue of prophethood and revelation can be seen as evolving from their initial predisposition towards evil.

Their statement concerning the insanity of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* amounts to nothing but a falsehood that is far removed

from the truth. Indeed, what is insanity? Insanity is when the capacity to think and choose between alternatives is inexistent in the human being. The underlying reason for insanity can be innate in a person's creation. In other words, Allah *Glorified is He* made the person that way. Or it can be the result of some type of misfortune which befell a person. For instance, a person who sustains a massive head trauma may permanently lose his ability to think properly.

Continuing our discussion of the verse in hand, Allah is merciful to His slave as He does not hold him to account until he reaches puberty and his mind has fully developed, when he is able to reproduce another like him. This is because if Allah had held a person to account before puberty, when the person undergoes the normal basic changes at the age of puberty he will realise he did not have the suitable abilities to act properly when he was younger.

Even though a child is not held to account before he reaches puberty, his father is asked to order his son to pray before the age of maturity to make him used to praying when he is young so that he will find it easy when he reaches the age of maturity and he will be used to following orders. The human being does not question his father's natural love and his eagerness to see good come to him. It is, no doubt, his father who rears him and ensures that he has everything that he needs. He has a real and tangible trust and confidence in his father. The Lord *Glorified is He* wants to nurture a sense of 'having to obey the one whose favour upon us is clear' within us. If this method is followed, when we reach the age of maturity, we will not experience any difficulty in assuming our responsibilities; these things will have already become a habit for us.

The One Who is responsible for granting the father the right to issue any command has also given him the right to implement a punishment if his command is not obeyed. This means that the orders that the child has to follow are given by his minor-lord, as it were, in the same way that the punishment (in the case of non-compliance) is meted out by this same minor-lord. This is all done in order to prepare him—through the clear paternal care and mercy he received from his parents—to obey the Lord of all that exists Who has generously bestowed blessings on the parent as well as the child.

This implies that a sound and mature mind is a mandatory pre-condition for assuming responsibility. Here, we are referring to the mind that is developed

and free; not the mind that is labouring under some type of external compulsion. If there is compulsion, there cannot be any real sense of responsibility.

Allah then says: 'See what similitudes they coin for you' (*al-A'raf*: 48). In fact, they attempted to declare him as being insane. A person suffering from insanity is unable to effectively weigh between different potential choices. In light of this, Allah *Glorified is He* responded to them by saying: 'Nun. By the pen and what they inscribe, You are not [O Muhammad], by the favor of your Lord, a madman. And indeed, for you is a reward uninterrupted. And indeed, you have a great moral character' (*al-Qalam*: 1-4). The Lord *Glorified is He* decisively negated that Muhammad, His Messenger, could ever be described in this way. Conversely, He established the fact that he (Prophet Muhammad) had a very noble character. The person suffering from insanity cannot be described as having a good character; he is not held accountable for his actions. He might curse this person, attack that person, or even spit in someone's face. In such situations, the only things we can do are smile and have mercy on him.

It will be reasonable for someone to ask, 'How does the Creator *Glorified is He* divest someone of the blessing of being able to effectively use his intellect; is the person in such a situation not a human being that has been elevated and honoured by Allah? How can he live like this; (without the intellect) he is just a shadow of a human being?'

If we want to understand the wisdom which underlies this reality, we must compare the conditions of those whose minds are sound and those who suffer from insanity. This will enable us to understand how just the One above the heavens is and to appreciate the Wisdom of the Creator. As for someone whose mind is sound, we hold you accountable for everything that you do; big and small. This is appropriate for the great status you seek to assume among creation; you desire position and authority, you do not want anybody to criticize you or what you say. In short, you want to do as you like.

But do you not notice that the person suffering from insanity does the same; he says and does whatever he likes. Furthermore, he is honoured (if you will) more than you in that he is not questioned about his actions in this life or the Hereafter. Is this not sufficient compensation for the loss of his intellect?

Do not look just at what has been taken from him; rather, look at what he has been given in terms of honours in this life and the Hereafter.

Allah then said: 'They have strayed, so they cannot [find] a way' (*al-Isra'*: 48). This means: They are unable to say anything that will deter or discourage any of the people who believe in you. They said, 'he is insane'; but this was nothing but a lie. They said, 'he is a magician'; again, they lied. They called him a poet, and they were also telling a lie. Lastly, they called him a soothsayer; and this amounted to nothing besides another lie. At this point, they had come to the end of the road; they were not going to be able to find any means of dissuading the people from following Prophet Muhammad.

When they realised that they were unable to invent any (despicable) character trait that could repel any people who wanted to believe in Prophet Muhammad, they proclaimed: 'O Allah! If this indeed is the Truth from you, then rain down on us stones from the sky' (*al-Anfal*: 32). Some of them even questioned: 'And they say, too, "Why was not this Quran bestowed from on high on some great man of the two cities?"' (*az-Zukhruf*: 31) They cannot come up with anything to impede the progress of your (Prophet Muhammad's) mission. This is proven by the fact that they were unable to quash the Prophet's mission although it was weak at the beginning of the call and despite the recurring persecution that was inflicted upon the early Muslims. In fact, in the face of all of this, you saw it grow day after another. The expanse of the faith grew steadily. As for their plots and conspiracies, they were completely stifled or forced into decline, as Allah *Glorified is He* mentions: 'Have they not seen that We gradually reduce the land from its outlying borders?' (*ar-Ra'd*: 41) The lands that accepted Islam were on a steady incline while the lands that chose to remain in disbelief were decreasing.

By referring to their hearing the Quran and their subsequent proclamation, 'Our hearts are shrouded in veils; our hearts are heedless (of what you are calling to Muhammad)', Allah *Glorified is He* wants to direct our attention to a very important principle, one that is applicable to all things. Namely, that every process requires someone who carries out the process and also requires someone upon who the process is carried out. For example, a farmer who uses a hoe to plough the soil; the soil allows him to do this. It reacts with the

farmer as he ploughs. In the end, the soil gives him the harvest that he was waiting to reap. On the other hand, if he performs the exact same process with a solid bed of rock, it will never allow him to do this. From this, we learn that the fruitful outcome of a process depends on two sides: the one who carries out the process and the one upon whom the process is carried out.

In light of this, I am completely astonished by these people who say, 'It is the West that is creating trials for the Muslims in their ability to practice their religion. They come to us advancing all types of (ill-fated) reforms and other deviant practices. They are trying to push various principles on us which result in nothing but our destruction. These people are trying to make us doubt our religion, etc.' We respond to these people by saying, 'How can any of you be harmed at all if (the West) did that and you refused to accept it from them. Leave them to do whatever they want. The important thing is that we refuse to accept these principles and values. The reason for our loss is not located in what the West is doing with us; rather, it is in our compliance with it. We eagerly and uncritically run behind everything that comes from their direction. This will not be the case if we had true faith in our hearts. The West wants to solidify its influence and inculcate its values (among our population). The only thing you have to do is refuse these misguided ways'.

It is upon the basis of this theory—the one who carries out the act and the one upon whom it is carried out—that all of the world's civilizations are constructed. This is a result of the fact that when the Lord *Glorified is He* summoned us forth into existence, He placed the essential elements of our lives at our disposal. These include the sun, moon, stars, earth, heavens, water, atmosphere, etc. Among these essentials of nature, some of them provide for you and serve you without forcing you to interact with them or to request anything from them. This is like the sun, water, and atmosphere. Other elements of nature do not provide for you until after you have interacted with them. This describes the earth; it does not provide for you until after you have cared for it by ploughing, watering, and seeding the soil.

The one who reflects deeply upon creation finds that all human achievements were based on the second process outlined above; the process which is described as that which does not provide for you until after you have

interacted with it. Human ambition has risen to the point where they have taken the first type of essential elements of nature—the type which provides for you unmediated and without you needing to have any control over them—and used them to obtain new benefits from them. An example being what is happening now with the use of solar power in new and unprecedented ways. Clearly, the one who takes the means, working with these base elements, and strives to advance and develop is not denied the progress that results from his efforts.

Therefore, if they come to make you doubt your religion, the blame is not on them but on you because you accepted what they said. This explains why it is our obligation and the obligation of everyone who is concerned with the rearing of our children to strengthen them to be able to withstand the current global invasion of atheism as well as Christian and Western ideals. We must teach them the basic principles of faith. This will enable them to defend themselves against this invasion and respond with evidence and convincing arguments in order not to fall prey to these people.

This and similar efforts represent the power of resistance that we use when inoculating against physical illness. To be sure, when it (a virus) tries to attack the body, it is unable to adversely affect it. Do you not see how Allah—in His Quran—presents the doubts the disbelievers spread? He mentions their whimsical arguments, discussing such doubts with them, and finally reveals the error of their views. He says: ‘Grave is the word that comes out of their mouths; what they say is nothing but a lie’ (*al-Kahf*: 5).

Why does the Quran display these arguments? Is it for us to adopt them and learn from them? No, it is so that when these arguments are presented, we will not be taken by surprise. When they rear their ugly heads, we will be sufficiently ready to protect ourselves from them; this method (of displaying their arguments) helps us to remain firm, as opposed to being shaken in our faith when we encounter arguments such as these.

As pointed out earlier, all of life’s transactions entail the one who carries out the act and the one upon whom the act is carried out. Previously, we cited an example; we said, ‘During the winter a person might blow on his hands in order to warm them, but he does the same thing to a cup of tea to cool it’. In both cases, the process is the same; the variable, however, is the object upon

which the act is carried out. This is exactly how different types of people hear the Quran and receive the Word of Allah. A person may hear the Quran when he is calm and receptive to his innate love of language; a natural passion for all beautiful linguistic expressions. This is something altogether different from if he heard it when he was overpowered by any stubborn, arrogant, or conceited inclinations.

This was the case with 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him*. He heard the Quran on two separate instances. One can be described as when he was in a state of disbelief, having extreme zeal (for disbelief) and harshly refusing to take heed of the Quran when it was recited. The second state was when he was in a state of faith and was softhearted, after he had heard the news of his sister's conversion to Islam. He hurried to her as she was reading the Quran. Upon reaching her, he struck her forcefully until she began to bleed from her face. When seeing this, he was taken by the natural compassion one has for his siblings; this compassion prevailed over the violent feelings that disbelief had produced in him. Once he heard the Quran while in this state of compassion, it had a profound impact on him. He believed immediately. It just so happened that the Quran had touched him, while his heart was pure. In such a circumstance, it inevitably had an impact on him.

The crux of the matter is that the person (to whom the Quran is recited) should be ready to accept to listen to the Quran and react to it in order for its impact to take place and produce a fruitful result. In fact, the Lord *Glorified is He* summarizes this issue for us in His words: 'And among them [O Muhammad] are those who listen to you, until when they depart from you, they say to those who were given knowledge, "What did he say just now?"' (*Muhammad*: 16) Then the response comes: 'Those are the ones whose hearts Allah has sealed and who follow their [own base] desires' (*Muhammad*: 16). In a separate verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And if We had made the Quran other than Arabic, they will have said, "Why are its verses not explained in detail [in our language]? Is it a foreign [recitation] and an Arab [Messenger]?" Say, "It is, for those who believe, a guide and a cure". And for those who do not believe—in their ears is a deafness, and it is blindness in their [eyes]' (*Fussilat*: 44). In essence, the Quran is one but how it is received (by different

people) varies. As a result, you should absolutely not blame the one who wants to call people to the path of misguidance. On the contrary, leave him in his misguidance but strengthen the others for them to become strong enough to withstand his call and be prevented from being affected by or responding to it.

After we have discussed the position of the disbelievers in relation to Allah's Divinity and their position in relation to the Prophethood (of Muhammad), we will discuss their position in relation to the Way that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was advancing. This Path touches upon many issues and includes several topics. However, the essence of this Path as well as its basic structure entails that we believe in the Hereafter. As long as we believe in the Hereafter, our growth and development in life will be harmonious. Of course, belief in the Hereafter implies belief in all of its delights and punishments. This belief gives us the impetus to perform good deeds and remain vigilant concerning our religious responsibilities in this life. This is strikingly similar to a student who works seriously and with assiduity throughout the year because he knows that the final exam will be held at the end of the year. He knows that his success or failure depends on his study habits.

The imbecile is the one who thinks this life is the last stop; the final destination. Indeed, all of Allah's slaves stand on an equal footing; yet, we notice that some die in the wombs of their mothers, and some die after only a few months or a few years. If this life was the final destination and the ultimate end, the duration of their stay in it should be the same for all people. Consequently, the difference in life spans in this life is a proof that it is not the ultimate end.

It is strange that in the spectacle of death we see people lamenting heavily over those who die young; they say, 'He was taken during his childhood'. This is the source of much wailing and crying, but why? They say, 'He never got the chance to enjoy the delights of this world'. Glory be to Allah! What is the world that you are referring to! In fact, Allah chose him before he was polluted by his sins and soiled by his misdeeds. Why, then, are you lamenting like this? If you were able to see what he was enjoying, you will be envious of him.

People make many mistakes when attempting to judge and assess the ultimate end and purpose of things. Certainly, every act the human being performs is in service of an end, but this is a temporal end, not an ultimate

end. The ultimate end is that which is not followed by anything else. The pupil studies at the elementary level in order to progress to the preparatory level. He then studies at that level to progress to the secondary level. This is the same way that worldly goals or 'ends' follow each other in succession until you arrive at the last stage in this life. The last stage is for a person to build a house, get married, and lead a happy life in which he enjoys the services and privileges he has been able to accumulate; these make him comfortable in this life. But this (short timeline) takes for granted that he will live until he completes all the various stages; nonetheless, it is possible that he will die before he reaches this goal.

Consequently, the human being must work; he must exert effort in order to become someone who is served. This service is directly related to the effort that you initially expended. Clearly, someone who felt it sufficient to discontinue his education after the elementary school level is not the same as someone who graduated from university; each one has his place and his rank. Without a doubt, there are different levels in life, as you have to make use of the means in this life and you only reap what you have sown. Therefore, your goal in this life is to become 'served' (as it were). The only thing is that the things that serve you can rebel against you or abandon you. On the other hand, in the Hereafter you will be spared all of this. No one besides you will have an effect on your happiness and contentment. By merely thinking of something, you will find it right before you. Indeed, you live in this life in accordance with the means; whereas in the Hereafter, you live in accordance to the One *Glorified is He* Who creates and controls all the means.

In this fashion, if you weigh the delights of this life and the delights of the Hereafter, the scale will tip in the direction of the delights of the Hereafter. In relation to this life, the extent of your relationship with it only consists of the number of years you spend in it; not the total amount of time that the world has existed or will exist. This should remind us of these people who are very pleased to announce that the world is several million years old. That is fine; but the more important question is, 'What do you have to do with all of these millions?'

Consequently, this life—as it relates to the person—is only the number of years one has in it, not the whole life span of this world. Even if we were to

suppose that a person's life span could be known with certainty, it will still be a moderate number of years, and will definitely be terminated by death. Add to this the fact that in this life your good fortune has a direct proportional relationship with your striving and taking the means of success in life.

The Hereafter, however, is ever lasting. It neither ends nor dies. Of course, this means that we can speak about the duration of our abiding in it with certainty as opposed to an approximation. Additionally, the extent of your enjoyment in it is not related to your capabilities; rather, it is related to the capability of your Creator *Glorified is He*.

So in essence, which is preferable? Which is a more suitable object (of someone's) striving and effort? It is sufficient for you to consider the following; whatever measure of good fortune you enjoy in this life even if you are at the peak of ease and luxury among the upper crust of the people, this state of affairs will be ruined by one of two things: You fear that this good fortune might decline with the onset of death or your fear that it might decline with the onset of poverty. Indeed, this means that it is a mixed blessing. In the Hereafter, you will not be apprehensive about the good fortune you experience passing you by nor about you passing it by (not being able to enjoy it). Which 'transaction' then is more profitable?

Then Allah *Glorified is He* addresses their denial of the resurrection after death:

وَقَالُوا إِذَا كُنَّا عِظْمًا وَرُفْنًا أَإِنَّا لَمَبْعُوثُونَ خَلْقًا جَدِيدًا ﴿٤٩﴾

**They also say, 'What? When we are turned to bones and dust,
shall we really be raised up in a new act of creation?' [49]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 49)**

The interrogative form that appears in the verse is intended to convey astonishment and their rejection of the idea that human beings will be resurrected on the Day of Judgment after they have become bones and dust.

The remnants and residue of something are thought of as being dust or particles from something that has decomposed. To be sure, these people considered the possibility of resurrection after death far-fetched and implausible. This is only because they were completely oblivious of the origins of existence and

the origins of the human being's creation. If we make use of the field of statistics—which was formulated by the scientists of our time—we will come to find that it serves this matter of faith; if we took a census of the world's population today, we will find that it is currently increasing. Nonetheless, if we backtracked, we will notice the number becoming regressively smaller as we go back in the past until we arrive at the original inhabitants of earth: Adam and Eve. The question then becomes, 'From where did they emerge into existence?' This is a matter of the unseen and it must be given due reflection.

Because of the very fact that it is a matter of the unseen, the Lord *Glorified is He* has taken the responsibility upon Himself of clarifying it to us. Indeed, if He declined to do this, people will continually err in their attempts to clarify this issue. When Allah *Glorified is He* elucidated this issue in His book, He did this in a way that increased the faith of the believers for them to be steadfast in front of any confusing statements that are said to cast doubts in their beliefs. This was for us not to follow those who say anything without thinking or contemplating about it while being showered with praise for saying things of which they are not certain. These people maintain that human beings descended from apes. This is a fallacious notion that is very easy to rebut. We simply ask, 'Why have not the remaining apes evolved into human beings?' Nonetheless, even if we suppose that the human being was originally an ape, where did it come from? It is a redundant topic; we just end up where we started. This is nothing beside unjustified clamour and a distraction from reality.

This is no different than the false notions which the geologists have stated; they now say that the sky, sun and earth were all one solitary mass before they separated from each another. But these are theories which are not supported by any conclusive evidence.

For this reason, the Creator *Glorified is He* desires to give us a glimpse of this matter for us not to fall victim to the misleading theories by following those who plunge into (explaining) these affairs without guidance. This means that we will have been reinforced against such blunders. To be sure, these are not the type of issues that can be figured out by way of empirical research. On the contrary, they can only be taken from the Creator; He has the most comprehensive knowledge about what He has created.

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 selves' (*al-Kahf*: 51). It is as though Allah is saying, 'There was no one with Me when I created the heavens and the earth, nor when I created the human being. No one witnessed Me (in the act of creation) for them to be able to describe what took place'. Allah continued: 'And I did not take the deviants as assistants' (*al-Kahf*: 51). This is saying: I have not taken any of these deceitful, misleading persons as an assistant or an aide. It is as though the Lord *Glorified is He* is saying to us, 'You should deem all of these people who advance premature arguments concerning the process of creation as "those who lead people astray." Hence, do not listen to them'.

This is for you to relieve yourself (of the responsibility) of investigating matters like these and to abstain from burdening the intellect with more than it is equipped to accommodate; the mind should not be made to exceed its proper function. The primary use of the mind is to discover empirical truths that are discovered by interacting with the material world. If this begins to veer in the direction of metaphysics, we do not follow this course. Indeed, there is nothing at the end of this process besides foolishness and conjecture; neither of which are of any benefit.

The intellect is one of the 'means of perception'. In this sense, it is like the eye, which is the 'means of visual imagery', or like the ear, which is the 'means through which sound is grasped'. As long as the intellect is a 'means' of perception, it must be bound by limits. Indeed, the eye has limits in what it is able to perceive and the ear is also bound by limits in what it is able to hear. In the same fashion, the intellect has limits in what it is able to conceive and grasp; (if you understand this) it will not be able to wander aimlessly into unknown territories with you. Your responsibility is to discipline the mind and to make use of it in the fields in which it is best suited to work; do not give it free rein in every issue.

For this very reason the philosophers wore themselves out; and they wore the world out with them! To be sure, they leapt head first into issues that were beyond the scope of the intellect. I challenge any school of philosophy that has ever existed—from the time of Greek Philosophy—to be in agreement

concerning any issue besides this one issue: Recognizing the necessity of exploring that which is beyond material existence. However, who informed you that there was a metaphysical realm that needed to be explored?

Undeniably, you were guided to the fact that there is a Creator for this existence by your innate sense of faith. Existence is not an outcome of chance as some say. Absolutely not; it has a Creator; He is the Creator of the matters of the unseen which you are seeking. These are the matters which you are exerting your minds to their outmost in order to merely speculate concerning their true nature. All the while, your only obligation was to say, 'That which is beyond the realm of the physical must explain itself to us'.

Without a doubt, if the philosophers agreed on the basic premise (that there is something beyond material realm) and leave it to the One Who is beyond the physical to reveal it to them, they will be spared a lot of fruitless exertion and exhaustion.

The Quran responded to their rejection of the resurrection and their saying: 'And they say, "When we are bones and crumbled particles, will we [truly] be resurrected as a new creation?"' Allah responded in His statement: 'Say, "Are there of your 'partners' any who begins creation and then repeats it?" Say, "Allah begins creation and then repeats it, so how are you deluded?"' (*Yunus*: 34), and His statement: 'On that Day we shall roll up the skies as written scrolls are rolled up; as we brought into being the first creation, so we shall bring it forth anew—a promise which We have willed upon Ourselves: for, behold, We are able to do [all things]' (*al-Anbiya'*: 104), as well as the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'And it is He [Allah] who creates [all life] in the first instance, and then brings it forth anew: and most easy is this for Him' (*ar-Rum*: 27). Indeed, reviving something is easier than creating it (*ex nihilo*) in the first instance.

The philosophers thought for a long time about this issue of resurrection after death. It is the issue they highlighted in their attempt to create doubts among the people about Allah's religion. Among the doubts they spread in respect to this issue was their saying, 'How can this be a sound conclusion? If someone dies and his corpse subsequently decomposes and becomes dust and dirt, and then there is a tree planted over where he is buried, the tree will be

nourished by the soil that used to be his body. If another human being eats from the fruit of the tree, he will then have taken in some of the constituents of the dead person. Some of the molecules of the original deceased will have transferred to the eater. This means that the added molecules that the eater has consumed have been taken away from the deceased. Per the dictates of logic, how can there be (bodily) resurrection after death?

This is what they say, but in fact, they have not taken into account that in an issue like this, the person of the human being and his physical constituents are two entirely different things. But we may ask: how is this so?

Consider the following: Someone becomes overweight and is advised by his physician to lose weight. As a result, he works to lose weight by using all of the known weight-loss methods. This process, whether weight gain or weight loss, is governed by two factors—namely, nourishment and expenditure of energy. The human being increases in size when the nourishment that he takes in exceeds the energy that he expends. When the opposite occurs, he becomes weak. The growing and developing child increases in size because he takes in more nourishment than he expends in energy. The man of mature age, on the other hand, expends more energy than the nourishment he takes in; this is why he is weak.

If someone who suffers from an illness that causes him to lose weight and become emaciated, he goes to the doctor and the doctor will treat him until he returns to his natural weight. Now, are the molecules of his body (that made up his weight) that he lost when he became thin the same exact molecules that go back into his body once he completes his treatment? In reality, the molecules of fat that he has shed are still present on the earth; no new organism has been formed out of them. (All we know about them is that) they are a set amount of fatty tissues (molecules) which used to strengthen him and make up his person.

Our Lord *Glorified is He* out of His Mercy has said: ‘We know what the earth diminishes of them, and with Us is a retaining record’ (*Qaf*: 4). The Lord *Glorified is He* will then reassemble the parts of each individual that are essential to the individual and make up their persons.

Allah *Glorified is He* then goes on to say:

قُلْ كُونُوا حِجَارَةً أَوْ حَدِيدًا ﴿٥٠﴾

Say, '[Yes] even if you were [as hard as] stone,
or iron [50] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 50)

This is as though Allah is saying, 'Say to them, while rebutting them, "You regard the resurrection as far-fetched and find it difficult to accept because it refers to resurrecting bones and dust that once upon a time were animate life. In fact, the 'familiarity' of these bones and dust with animate life will make it easier for them to be returned to their former state. Nonetheless, greater than this is the power of the Creator *Glorified is He* to return you to your former living states even if you had become stone or iron after your deaths. These are two material substances that they never used to think of as being living animate objects". It is as though the Lord *Glorified is He* is challenging them with an example of something as far removed from life as can be imagined. First, He says 'stone' and then progresses to 'iron' while addressing them. This is because iron is more resolute and unbending than stone; moreover, iron is capable of cutting stone. Allah is saying, 'If you were a stone in this life, I (Allah) will resurrect you as stone and if you were iron, I will resurrect you as iron'. Next, Allah *Glorified is He* takes the dialogue a step further; He *Glorified is He* says:

أَوْ خَلْقًا مِّمَّا يَكْبُرُ فِي صُدُورِكُمْ فَسَيَقُولُونَ مَن يُعِيدُنَا قُلِ الَّذِي فَطَرَكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ
فَسَيُنْغِضُونَ إِلَيْكَ رُءُوسَهُمْ وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَى هُوَ قُلْ عَسَىٰ أَن يَكُونَ قَرِيبًا ﴿٥١﴾

Or any other substance you think hard to bring to life.'
Then they will say, 'Who will bring us back?' Say, 'The One
who created you the first time.' Then they will shake their
heads at you and say, 'When will that be?' Say, 'It may well
be very soon [51] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 51)

Allah's statement: 'Or [any] other substance you think is greater [or harder to reproduce]' (*al-Isra'*: 51). This is as though Allah is saying, 'Bring anything you want, no matter how unlikely it is (that it can be resurrected).

Dig deep, search well in your attempt to meet this challenge by bringing something far removed from life. To be sure, I am able to resurrect it no matter how far removed from life it might be'.

Concerning Allah's statement: 'you think is greater [or harder to reproduce]' (*al-Isra'*: 51), the intended meaning of this is, 'Choose something that is great and is known for being without life. You cannot find anything that has these characteristics besides stone and iron. These things are the elements that are most deprived of life'. This was something they unanimously agreed upon; there was nothing in their direct surroundings more unbending and inflexible than stone and iron. Nevertheless, the Lord *Glorified is He* allowed the disbelievers, themselves, to choose an appropriate substance; He is challenging them to choose and settle on one thing. This thing should be more distant from the possibility of being given life than stone or iron.

When we ponder over Allah's saying: 'or any other substance you think is greater [or harder to reproduce]' (*al-Isra'*: 51), we notice that the thing being referred to here is left completely unspecified. This is because although they agree on the impossibility of bringing beings made of iron and stone to life again, they differ with regards to the beings made of elements harder and stronger than iron and stone. Therefore, this verse states an unspecified object so that it may refer to anything anyone may think of.

Because Imam 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* was known for his quick intellect and intuition and for being very experienced in issuing legal verdicts, some people wanted to test him by asking him a question that required a protracted enquiry into the various substances and their respective properties. They asked him about the strongest substance in the world. They disagreed about this issue. Some of them said, 'Iron is the strongest'. Others said, 'No, stone is the strongest'. Some even said, 'Water is the strongest'. In this regard, 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* said to them an answer which reflects his extensive experience and profound knowledge. He did not say, 'The most durable items out of Allah's creation are such and such' by mentioning whatever came to his mind. On the contrary, he at first specified the number of strong substances by saying: 'The most durable elements of all Allah's creation are ten [in number]'. Indeed, this was not an impromptu reply.

Rather, it was something that he duly studied and investigated. He extended his fingers and began to count the ten substances. It was as though he was a teacher who had duly prepared the lessons he was going to deliver. He said, 'The ten strongest things Allah created are: The deeply embedded mountains; but iron can cut through mountains. However, the iron can be melted by fire; but fire can be extinguished by water. On the other hand, the water is carried by the rainclouds floating between the heavens and the earth; but the clouds can be dissipated by strong winds. Nevertheless, the human being can shield himself against strong winds using his clothes or any other material. Despite this, the human being can be overcome by drunkenness; but drunkenness is overcome by sleep. And finally sleep is overcome by anxiety. Therefore, it is anxiety which is the strongest of Allah's creation'.

These are the things referred to in Allah's saying: 'or any other substance you think is greater [or harder to reproduce]' (*al-Isra'*: 51). Accordingly, although they are the strongest things, Allah *Glorified is He* is capable of bringing them back to life and resurrecting them just as sure as you are all now alive on this earth.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Then they will say, "Who will restore us?" Say, "He Who created you the first time"' (*al-Isra'*: 51). This means that the One Who created you (*ex nihilo*) for the first time is surely capable of returning you to life again. In fact, the process of returning people back to life is easier than the first creation. However, the answer will not be convincing unless it entails a conclusion that the other party agrees on. Are they convinced that Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who created them? Yes, they accept this fact in spite of their disbelief. The proof for this is clearly stated in the Glorious Quran: 'And if thou ask them who created them, they will surely say, "Allah"' (*az-Zukhruf*: 87). They are convinced of this, but they state another argument, asking, 'Who will restore us and bring us back to life?' If you say to them, 'The One who created you the first time': 'They will then shake their heads towards you and say, "When will that be?"' (*al-Isra'*: 51). Shaking heads in this situation is a sign of mockery and ridicule. When we ponder over this Quranic phrase: 'They will then shake their heads towards you' (*al-Isra'*: 51), we recognize that it is describing an action that will occur

in the future due to the free choice of the one performing it. The context refers to a debate between the disbelievers and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who recited this verse before them.

In this very situation, they had the opportunity to practically belie Prophet Muhammad by not shaking their heads towards him *peace and blessings be upon him*. By not shaking their heads, and thereby acting differently to what is mentioned in the Quran, they could have objected to this saying in the Quran and accused it of being fabricated. However, it is Allah *Glorified is He* Who is the Master of all affairs and therefore He made them hear this verse repeatedly without acting differently to what it states. This proves the stupidity of the disbelievers and the absurdity of their ideas.

Their situation in this respect closely resembles their reaction against the incident of the changing of the *Qibla* (the direction towards which Muslims direct themselves in Prayer). Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We have seen the turning of your face [Prophet Muhammad] to heaven [hoping that the *Qibla* will be changed]. And now verily We shall make you turn [in Prayer] toward a *Qibla* which is dear to you' (*al-Baqara*: 144). Allah *Glorified is He* responded to Prophet Muhammad's supplications and changed the *Qibla* from Jerusalem to Mecca. After that, Allah informed His Prophet, Muhammad, that the disbelievers will mock at this change of the *Qibla* and say, as is related in the Quran: 'What has turned them away from the direction of Prayer they have hitherto observed' (*al-Baqara*: 142). This was a statement that they will issue due to their own free will in the future. Therefore, they could have, upon hearing this verse, refrained themselves from saying this for them to be able to challenge the truthfulness of the Quran. Yet, they said exactly what the Quran said they will say. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* knew what they will surely say. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'and [they] say, "When will that be?"' (*al-Isra*': 51)

The question being posed here is like the previous question; it is a form of denial and also an exclamation. This indicates that they think that the resurrection after death is implausible. You may notice here that the question pertains to time. They have shifted the debate from the plausibility of resurrection to specifying its actual time. This represents their withdrawal from the earlier

issue. They earlier said, 'Who will bring us back (to life)?' But now they are saying, 'When will this take place?' The answer is addressed to them thus: '...Say, "Perhaps it is near"' (*al-Isra'*: 51). The word '*asa*' (perhaps) connotes substantiated hope. Substantiated hope relates to those things that are expected; of course, this will vary according to the one who is hoping and that for which he is hoping. If you say, for instance, 'Perhaps ('*asa*) so-and-so will give you this or that thing'; this is a more distant hope because it is a hope that someone else will give you something. On the other hand, when you say, 'Perhaps I will give you such-and-such a thing'; this is a hope that is closer to being realized because the person is talking about himself. Indeed, a person has more confidence in himself than he has in others. Yet, even in spite of this, my opinion might change and I may decide not to give it to you. Or, the time of granting you (what I said I will perhaps grant you) might come and I might not be able to deliver. Conversely, if you said, 'Perhaps Allah will give you such and such'. Without a doubt it is a hope that it is closer to being realized because you have placed hope in Allah *Glorified is He*; the One Who is not overcome or burdened by anything in the heavens or on earth. If the One issuing the statement is Allah Himself *Glorified is He* not only is the hope that he is expressing substantiated, but also the circumstances concerned with what is hoped for, will inevitably occur. In essence, there are three levels of hope; someone having hope in another person is one level and a person having hope in himself concerning an issue affecting another person—that he will be able to perform a given action for him—is another level. And the hope that someone has in Allah is an entirely different level.

Indeed, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explained for us the issue of 'something being near' when He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I and the Final Hour were sent forward like these two'⁽¹⁾. He then indicated how close with his index and middle fingers. This nearness to the Final Hour is due to there being no Messenger after him. This means that he and the Day of Judgment are next to each other, there is nothing (eventful)

(1) *An agreed upon Hadith of Prophet Muhammad. It has been narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (book of authentic Hadiths) (2951). It was also narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (11/347 Fath Al-Bari) on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him.*

that separates the two. This resembles one saying, 'Everything that is sure to arrive is (in reality) right around the corner' because any event that will inevitably occur in the future is near; that is, it will surely come.

Allah says:

يَوْمَ يَدْعُوكُمْ فَتَسْتَجِيبُونَ بِحَمْدِهِ وَتَظُنُّونَ إِن لَّبِثْتُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿٥٢﴾

It will be the Day when He calls you, and you answer by praising Him, and you think you have stayed [on earth] only a little while [52] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 52)

This day refers to the Day of Judgment. It is the day in which none will be able to escape or flee from what Allah wills for him. This is unlike the case in the worldly life when one may think that he is able to flee from Allah's Decrees. When creating human beings, Allah *Glorified is He* placed human will power in authority over human limbs in respect to those matters where they are able to exercise a choice. Therefore, man is an independent agent; he does whatever he chooses, says whatever he wishes, and refrains from whatever he wants. In this regard, his will possesses the power to control his limbs. As for those matters with which he is naturally compelled to comply, his will has no effect whatsoever.

On the Day of Judgment, man's will and limbs will be separated. The authority that he once wielded over his limbs will cease to exist. This is proven by the fact that on the Day of Judgment one's limbs will offer testimony to the person's choices and deeds in this worldly life. Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'And they shall say to their skins, "Why have you borne witness against us?" They shall say, "Allah Who makes everything speak has made us speak..."' (*Fussilat*: 21). This means that limbs, addressing man on the Day of Judgment, will say, 'We surely were made subservient to you in the worldly life—the time when means were employed. As for now, we are all connected to the One *Glorified is He* Who causes all things to act. You no longer have power over us'. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* on the Day of Judgment will say: 'To whom belongs the kingdom this day? To Allah, the One, the Subduer (of all)' (*Ghafir*: 16). In the worldly life, people are empowered and vested with the rights of ownership; the benefits of some have been placed in

the hands of others. However, in the Hereafter, the affair and the dominion are entirely in Allah's Hands alone; concerning which He has no partner: 'It will be on the Day when He calls you' (*al-Isra'*: 52) (saying to you all: rise from your graves and come forward when the Trumpet is blown for the second time to have your bodies revived): '...And you answer by praising Him...' (*al-Isra'*: 52). This is as though Allah says, 'You will rise imbued with a sense of obedience and surrender. You will not come forth in a spirit of disdain, disregard, or arrogance. The worldly life in which you had such attributes is over and now is the time for the eternal life in the Hereafter'.

We notice that Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and you will answer (*tastajiboon*)...' (*al-Isra'*: 52) instead of saying, 'and you will respond (*tujibun*)'. This is because answering (denoted in the word '*tastajiboon*') denotes absolute obedience and submission. The same is the case with the words '*fahim*' (to understand) and '*istafhama*' ('to seek clarity' or 'to inquire'). The latter implies that one is actively seeking an understanding. In the same sense, the word '*tastajiboon*' (you will answer)—which conforms to the same linguistic pattern—implies that you are actively seeking a way to answer. You are insistent and diligent about responding, rather than refusing and being slow to answer. In brief, you are rushing to comply with the order which was given to you.

However, not only will you answer the order, but Allah explains: '...you will answer by praising Him...' (*al-Isra'*: 52). This gives us an even more detailed picture of the Resurrection: It implies that you will rise and rush to stand before Allah, praising and thanking Him. But, how is it that you praise Him when this is only done if someone is granted what he desires? Yes, they will certainly praise Allah *Glorified is He*. This is because they will be witnessing first-hand the day which Allah *Glorified is He* kept reminding them of and incessantly called upon them to have faith in and to do good deeds in preparation for, despite their rejection and denial. Now they are here and witnessing that which they used to reject; the reality that they had once deemed a falsehood is now unfolding before their very eyes. It is true, then: They will rise—from their graves—praising Allah *Glorified is He*; Who had made them aware of what lay ahead of them and was never negligent in advising them to follow the right path. This is no different from how you

advise your child to study hard. If he neglects to take your advice and subsequently fails on his examination, he will come to you remorsefully, 'You gave me the right advice, but I failed to take heed'.

Therefore, the portrait of the Hereafter, which Allah *Glorified is He* details for us, is a blessing rejected by the disbelievers in this world but they will recognize and believe in it in the next life. They will come to the realization that it was in fact one of the greatest of Allah's Favours upon them. In spite of the suddenness of this realization, it will be too late for them to gain any benefit from it.

In this connection, scholars of the orientalist tradition object to the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny?' (*ar-Rahman*: 34). This verse comes after the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'The flames of fire and smoke will be sent on you two, then you will not be able to defend yourselves' (*ar-Rahman*: 35). In their view, the verse discusses punishment and retribution, so it is not in harmony with the following verse: 'Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny?' (*ar-Rahman*: 34)

The attentive observer of the verse, however, recognizes that the two verses are in complete harmony. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* admonishing people and warning them of the impending punishment awaiting them if they continue upon the path of misguidance is a favour. You are being warned in order for you not to commit the acts that lead to such a punishment. To be sure, the one who is aware of the punishment for a certain crime refrains from committing it.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'and you will think you have stayed only a little while' (*al-Isra*': 52). The word '*tathunnoon*' (you will think) comes from the word '*thann*' (speculation) which refers to the most likely of all available opinions. This is because they were hesitant to believe in and were not certain about the resurrection.

The Quranic phrase: 'you have stayed' refers to one's life span in the worldly life or the time spent in the grave. Undeniably, the worldly life is a short period of amusement. But on top of that, when your time in it draws to a close, nothing from it remains with you. The same can be said of the grave. The deceased in his

grave is like the one who is asleep; he does not know how long he has slept. The only thing he is able to imagine is the customary stint of rest that most people are familiar with when they sleep. This explains why, when each individual is asked, 'How long did you remain asleep?' the answer is always, 'A day or the better part of a day'. This is the period of time that is most well known to people. A sense of time is gained by noticing different events. However, during sleep, and to a greater extent death, we do not move at all. Furthermore, how can we notice anything we do when we are not even conscience?

In fact, in another verse Allah *Glorified is He* states: '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). He *Glorified is He* also states: 'He will say, "How many years did you tarry in the earth?" They will say, "We tarried a day or part of a day, but ask those who keep account"' (*al-Mu'minun*: 112-113). This is to say, 'We were not aware enough to count the passing days. Ask those who are able to count'.

There is also the story of 'Uzair (Ezra) whom Allah *Glorified is He* caused to die for a period of a hundred years, after which He *Glorified is He* resurrected him and asked him: '...He [Allah] said, "How long have you tarried?" He said, "I have tarried a day, or a part of a day"...' (*al-Baqara*: 259). This was the normal amount of time that he used to rest. However, Allah *Glorified is He* clarified for him what had actually occurred: '...He [Allah] said, "Nay! you have tarried a hundred years; then look at your food and drink—years have not passed over it; and look at your ass..."'⁽¹⁾ (*al-Baqara*: 259). This means that, as much as 'Uzair could perceive, the amount of time (he had spent dead) amounted to a day or part of a day. Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently explained that it had been a hundred years. Clearly, the difference between the two amounts is staggering. Nonetheless, even with that staggering difference, both statements are truthful. Allah *Glorified is He* has given us proof of that. Indeed, when He resurrected 'Uzair from the dead, he found that his

(1) *In terms of his food, it has been mentioned that he had with him: grapes, figs, and juice. He found that they had not changed at all. The juice had not fermented (and become alcohol). The figs had not become sour. And the grapes had not rotted. This is an excerpt from the Tafsir of Ibn Kathir (1/314).*

donkey had become decrepit bones; this made the figure of a hundred years credible. But when he turned and looked at his food and drink, he found that they had not been changed at all; it was as though he had only been resting a day or part of a day. If a hundred years had passed over the food and drink, it will have completely decomposed, not just changed. It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* constricted the flow of time and extended it at one and the same time. Indeed, He is *Al-Basit* (The Expander) and *Al-Qabid* (The Constrictor). In essence, the statement of Allah *Glorified is He* (one hundred years) is true. Likewise, the statement of 'Uzair (a day or part of a day) is also true. There is none capable of joining polar opposites besides the Creator *Glorified is He* of all things and their opposites.

After the Quran discusses the position of the disbelievers in reference to Allah's Divinity, their stance in relation to prophethood, their rejection of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* their view of Allah's Way and their disbelief in the resurrection and the Day of Judgment, He *Glorified is He* wants to begin giving us lessons which will help us to implement His Way. He *Glorified is He* states⁽¹⁾:

وَقُلْ لِعِبَادِي يَقُولُوا الَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ يَنْزِعُ بَيْنَهُمْ
إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ كَانَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ عَدُوًّا مُبِينًا

**[Prophet], tell My servants to say what is best. Satan sows
discord among them: Satan is a sworn enemy of man [53]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 53)**

Previously, we clarified the difference between slaves when the word 'abid' is used and slaves when the word 'ibad' is used; both of them are the plural of the word slave (*abd*). However, the word 'abid' is used in reference to one who has submitted to the will of his master in those things that are compulsory for him but who acts rebelliously in relation to those things in

(1) In *Asbab An-Nuzul* (p.166), in relation to the occasion surrounding the revelation of this verse, Wahidi mentioned, 'This was revealed in regard to 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him. One of the men from among the Arabs had cursed him and Allah *Glorified is He* ordered him to forgive the man'. Al-Qurtubi said in his *Tafsir* (5/4004), 'This has been mentioned by Thalabi, Mawardi, Ibn Atiyya and Wahidi'.

which he has a choice. As for the term '*ibad*', it is used to indicate one who submits to the will of his master in all of his affairs: Those which are compulsory for him as well as those in which he has a choice. To phrase it another way, he gives what Allah *Glorified is He* wants priority over that which he wants. Concerning these persons, Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'And the slaves (*ibad*) of the Most Merciful are those who walk upon the earth in humility, and when the ignorant address them [harshly], they say [words of] peace, And those who spend [part of] the night before their Lord, prostrating and standing [in Prayer]' (*al-Furqan*: 63-64). The difference between them exists in relation to the life of this world and not the Hereafter. The ability to choose upon which the differences between the two types of people are based will be removed in the Hereafter. In the light of this, all will be equal in the Hereafter. All of them are (*abid*) and (*ibad*). This explains why Allah *Glorified is He* will say to Satan (Iblis) in the Hereafter: 'Was it you who led these My slaves (*ibad*) astray, or did they by themselves stray from the Right Path?' (*al-Furqan*: 17) He referred to them as '*ibad*' in spite of their disbelief and misguidance.

The Quranic verse: '...and say that which is best...' (*al-Isra'*: 53) means: with an expression or statement that is best. Or, in the same manner we can say: the action that is best. The meaning becomes, 'Say (Oh Muhammad) to My slaves that they should say that which is best and speak kindly. This is because they are ready to implement your command and they believe you are truthful'.

The phrase: 'That which is best' (*al-Isra'*: 53) means that which embodies the greatest form of kindness—that from which all things in life which maintain a standard of excellence emanate. Faith in Allah *Glorified is He*—that is, to bear witness that there is nothing worthy of worship besides Allah—is that which is best. This is the best and first thing that should be said. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to say, 'The best thing that I have said, and the best thing the prophets who preceded me have said is, "There is nothing worthy of worship besides Allah"' ⁽¹⁾

(1) Narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his *Sunan* (3585) on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn Amr ibn Al-Aas Allah be pleased with him. At-Tirmidhi said, 'This Hadith, as Narrated with this narration, is classified as *gharib* (that is, it has only one narrator in one of the stages in the chain of narrators)'.

This is the case since from it all good springs. It is the pinnacle of excellence in the true sense of the word. In fact, as long as you have faith in Allah *Glorified is He* the only lessons you receive (in life) will be from Him and the only thing you fear will be Him. Furthermore, you will only be desirous (of pleasing) Him. In this manner, the whole of your affairs, in the life of this world and the Hereafter, will be made excellent.

You only say, 'There is nothing worthy of worship besides Allah', after you are convinced of its truth. You want to spread this declaration to all of those within reach of your voice. It is not enough that you believe in it yourself; by no means, you want others to join and participate with you in performing this good act. This is the reason why, when we pronounce it, one says, 'I bear witness that there is nothing worthy of worship besides Allah'. The phrase 'I bear witness' implies that you testify and make it clear for those who do not bear witness to it. It is as though your faith in this declaration calls upon you to proclaim it among the people and propagate it in their midst.

We can also say that the meaning of: 'That which is best' (*al-Isra'*: 53) refers to any good word. By the same token: 'That which is best' may allude to an effective but mannerly style of debate, as Allah *Glorified is He* states: '...and reason with them in the best manner' (*an-Nahl*: 125). We could also say that: 'That which is best' refers to distinguishing between mutually exclusive propositions and examining them using our intellect. Afterwards, we chose the proposition 'which is best' and address our audience with it.

Essentially: 'that which is best'—as an expression—can be used in many ways to encompass all good things in any of life's activities that involve speech or action. For example, we can observe the activity of debating—especially if it is being done with the intention of making the Word of Allah *Glorified is He* the uppermost. Undoubtedly, your rival dislikes the general position that you are advocating. If you then deal harshly with him and choose your words roughly and maliciously, what began as a simple disagreement will end in personal animosity.

Once this becomes a personal issue, you have lit the fire of his rage. In reality, he needs you to be gentle with him. You are not trying to provoke him to angrily move from being your acquaintance to hating you. On the contrary,

try to make him move from merely being your acquaintance to actually loving you. This process will extinguish the flames of his hostility—which are directed at your argument—increase the feelings of friendship between you all and increase the likelihood of his accepting what you are saying. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘The good and the evil deed are not alike. Repel (evil) with what is best, then lo! He between whom and you there was enmity [will become] as if he were a warm friend’ (*Fussilat*: 34). It may be said, ‘I have repelled evil with that which is better; but in spite of this, my enemy persists in his aggression against me. I have yet to gain his respect’. We respond to this enquirer by saying, ‘You think that you have repelled evil with that which is better, but reality belies this claim. In fact, what you have done is that you have attempted to test the reliability of Allah’s Word. This ‘test’ that you have administered is paramount to doubting Allah. What you must do now is repel evil with good but without attempting to test Allah’s Word. If you do this in earnest, you will find your enemy will become your friend right before your eyes’. The poet has expressed this magnificently:

‘O you who are weary from (attempting) to interact with the one who is responsible for this and the one who is accountable for that

Resist and endure their (bad conduct) until you see the verse of Allah’s Book⁽¹⁾ made manifest!

However, why do we say (with what is best)? The reason for this is that Satan (Iblis) strives to create strife between you: ‘Indeed, Satan sows discord between them’ (*al-Isra'*: 53). The discord (*nazgh*) being referred to here are the impulses and insinuations that are produced by Satan (Iblis). In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And if a prompting from Satan should harm you, seek refuge in Allah; surely, He is the Hearing, the Knowing’ (*al-A'raf*: 200). If you are on guard against Satan and weary of his deceptive stratagems, remember Allah when he goads and incites you towards evil. If you do this,

(1) As for the saying of the poet, 'until you see the verse of Allah’s Book manifest', it refers to seeing the manifestation of what is contained in the verse: ‘He between whom and you was enmity will be as if he were a warm friend’ (*Fussilat*: 34). Persistently responding with that which is best makes the animosity that exists between you and someone else turn into friendship.

he will depart from you straight away and take up his cause with someone else. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us concerning Satan and his promptings to seek refuge in Him: 'From the mischief of the whisper [of evil], who withdraws' (*an-Nas*: 4). This verse states that the Satan withdraws and slinks away when the name of Allah is mentioned. Conversely, if Satan recognizes a weakness or heedlessness in anyone, he keeps whispering to him until the person surrenders to such whispers and so becomes an easy prey to Satan's schemes.

In many instances, the insinuations of Satan (Iblis) come as if they are probes and tests for the believer to warn him of this enemy. Satan (Iblis) entices man time and time again in order to test whether he will respond to his insinuations. As this is the way of Satan, then when you dispute with that which is better, you do not give Satan (Iblis) an opportunity to light the flame of personal animosity between you and anyone else; animosity which leads you to curse and swear at one another. This is how simple differences of opinions and viewpoints may change into fully-fledged personal hatred.

In the light of this, when you see two people, with whom you share no relationship, engaged in an argument and you feel unhappy when you see them attack each other like this, you only need to say, 'I seek refuge with Allah from Satan (Iblis), the Accursed' three times. I assure you that the dispute will come to an end. This is analogous to cold water that extinguishes the fire of anger, drives Satan (Iblis) away, and reassures people. Your role here is strikingly similar to a fire fighter who rushes in to put out a blaze, especially if this action is coupled with a sincere intention for the welfare of the disputing parties; that is, you have nothing to gain by your involvement.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Satan sows discord between them' (*al-Isra'*: 53). You may notice that the enticement of Satan (Iblis) is not limited to affecting opposing parties engaged in a contentious argument about a religious issue or matter of faith. On the contrary, his insinuations enter between brothers, relatives and loved ones. Allah relates to us in the Quran that Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* said: '...after Satan had sowed discord between me and my brothers' (*Yusuf*: 100), although they were ancestors of prophets. But this prophetic ancestry was what kept iniquity from growing into uncontrollable proportions among them. This is a proof of their goodness. There is a way

you can distinguish between the good and the evil. You find that the good people may threaten to do the harshest actions, but they eventually adopt an easy course. The evil people, on the other hand, are exactly the opposite; they may seem as though they do not intend to harm anyone, but they eventually do the harshest thing possible. Consider what the brothers of Yusuf said, as related in the Quran: 'Kill Yusuf (Joseph) or drive him away to a faraway land' (*al-Isra'*: 9). However, one of them proposed to cast him into the dark depths of a well. He posed this suggestion out of a desire to see his brother survive, as is established by his statement which Allah relates: '...so that he will be picked up by some caravan' (*Yusuf*: 10). As such, you can observe that the evil (manifested in their suggestion to murder Yusuf *peace be upon him*) that initially had taken root in their souls eventually gave way to a less severe alternative.

Next in the verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Indeed, Satan is a sworn enemy of man' (*al-Isra'*: 53). This verse clearly states that Satan's (Iblis) enmity towards people is as old as our forefather Adam *peace be upon him*. This means that it is a deeply rooted and well-established enmity. Allah says about him: 'Adam, this is an enemy for you and your wife, so do not let him expel you from the Garden and thus make you miserable' (*Ta Ha*: 117). Taking this into account, it is a father's responsibility to teach his children the story of the first enmity that came between Satan (Iblis) and Adam *peace be upon him* just as he teaches him the ways of life and the ins and outs of survival. Furthermore, he must teach him that the urges to do good that cross his mind are from Allah, but the impulses to do evil actions that cross his mind are from Satan (Iblis). As such, the young people should be fully aware of Satan (Iblis), his impulses and his insinuations towards evil. This is the way to instil a protective barrier of faith in his son. As a result, the son becomes prepared for the plots and evil schemes of Satan (Iblis) and the impulses that he will send his way. Children should be taught that every affair that contravenes the Divine law is from Satan (Iblis). Parents should exert their utmost to instil these meanings and concepts in the minds of their children.

The Quran clearly states: 'Indeed, Satan is a sworn enemy of man' (*al-Isra'*: 53), that is, Satan's sworn enmity is everlasting until the Day of Judgment. This is proven by the pledge taken by Satan that he will keep insinuating the children

of Adam till the end of time. Allah states what Satan said: 'If you give me respite until the Resurrection Day, I will surely bring his descendants under my sway and mislead them, all but a few' (*al-Isra'*: 62). Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

رَبُّكُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِكُمْ إِنَّ يَشَاءُ يَرْحَمَكُمُ أَوْ إِن يَشَاءُ يُعَذِّبْكُمْ وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَكِيلًا ﴿٥٤﴾

Your Lord has the most knowledge about all of you: if He pleases He will have mercy on you, and if He pleases He will punish you. [Prophet], We did not send you to take charge of them [54] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 54)

This verse indicates that Allah's Will is unlimited; if He chooses to be merciful towards us, then this is out of His Grace, and if He chooses to punish us, then this is what justice dictates as a recompense for our evil deeds. In fact, if Allah *Glorified is He* judges us according to the dictates of justice, not a single one of us will survive. This is because when anyone of us counts the good and bad deeds he does, he will certainly find himself deserving punishment. For this reason, it is advisable to supplicate Allah saying, 'O Allah, treat us with favour and not with justice, with benevolence not fairness, and after compensating for our deficiencies not with a reckoning'. Allah *Glorified is He* does not prevent His Mercy from disobedient people, nor does He give them respite just to punish them later—according to what they justly deserve. Rather, He keeps them always in a state between fearing His Punishment and hoping for His Forgiveness.

When the early Muslims were exposed to various types of persecution and torture, and had none to protect them or deliver them from this torture, they went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon them* and complained to him about their sufferings. Prophet Muhammad studied the circumstances of all the lands in search of an appropriate place that could serve as a refuge for these people who had suffered persecution. He ordered them to migrate to Abyssinia (now known as Ethiopia). Concerning this land, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Indeed, the king who assumes power there is a just ruler under whom no one is oppressed'.⁽¹⁾

(1) Um Salama Allah be pleased with her said, 'Mecca was a difficult place for us [Muslims] and the Companions of Prophet Muhammad had been inflicted with unspeakable oppression. Prophet Muhammad was under the protection of his uncle and his people; this meant that =

It was a time in which they could not defend themselves. The weak among them were incapable of confronting the oppression and the strong among them were incapable of protecting the weak. The strong people from among the Muslims used to go to Prophet Muhammad and suggest that they respond to the aggression of the disbelievers by doing this and that, but Prophet Muhammad used to say, 'I have not received any order (to respond to their aggression), I have not received any order...'.

Allah decreed that every believer should undergo sufferings and different kinds of persecution in order to be capable to endure trials and hardships. Indeed, these were the people who later carried the Message that flowed throughout the earth, proclaiming the Message of Allah. Delivering Allah's Message requires resoluteness and strength. As such, the believers had to be tested. This explains why the early period of Islam, during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad, was marked by calamities and adversities. It was a period that witnessed, on the one hand, the regular torture and persecution of the believers, and, on the other hand, the incident of *Al-Isra' wa Al-Mi'raj* (the Night Journey). The underlying wisdom behind all of these occurrences was to test the Muslims and make clear who truly believed in Islam. Having endured all these afflictions and hardships, only the strong believers were the ones who were able to hold on firmly to the Divine Message and convey it to the four corners of the world. This is so that there will be no one among the Muslims who were only interested in seeking some worldly gains. In Islam, the gains are not in this world, but the real gain is Paradise whose width is equivalent to that of the heavens and the earth.

For this reason, in the Second Pledge of Allegiance at 'Aqaba, they said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'O Muhammad! Ask for whatever you want on behalf of your Lord and on behalf of yourself. Then, inform us of our reward from Allah and from you if we comply with your

= he was not forced to endure any of the attacks that befell his Companions. At that time, Prophet Muhammad said to his Companions, "Indeed, in the land of Ethiopia there is a king under whom no one is oppressed, so travel to his land and reside there until Allah alleviates your burden and grants you a way out from what you are experiencing here". This is part of a longer Hadith narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in *Dala'il An-Nubuwwa* (2/301) and Ibn Hisham in his *As-Sirah* (Biography of Prophet Muhammad) (1/321).

orders'. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then said, 'For my Lord, I ask that you worship Him and associate no partner with him. For my Companions and me, I ask that you host us, support us and ward off from us those things that you have warded off from yourselves'. They said, 'What do we get if we comply with your orders?' What did Prophet Muhammad say to them? Did he tell them, 'You will lead a prosperous and affluent life?' No, he did not. Rather, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Your reward is Paradise'.⁽¹⁾ They said, 'Then we shall comply with your request'.

This is the real reward a believer should attempt to attain. Indeed, it is conceivable that one of them might die after making this pledge and before enjoying any welfare due to Islam prevailing and gaining dominance. Clearly, Prophet Muhammad is truthful in what he has promised. As long as the reward is Paradise, there should be strong believers who are firm and steadfast in order to be able to confront hardships, trials, and tribulations.

Accordingly, the meaning of Allah's saying: 'You Lord is the most knowledgeable about you [and what you deserve]: if He pleases He will have mercy on you' (*al-Isra'*: 54) is that Allah is the most knowledgeable of you; He may show His Mercy towards you, granting you an avenue to get out of Mecca by giving you a refuge in Abyssinia, or: '...if He please He will punish you' (*al-Isra'*: 54), that is put you into hardships in order to test your faith and make known which believers are worthy of carrying Allah's Message.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'We did not send you to be a guardian (*Wakil*) over them' (*al-Isra'*: 54). A *wakil* is the person who is entrusted by somebody to perform a specific task. The intended meaning here is: We did not send you for any other purpose besides conveying the Message. After the successful performance of this task, you are not responsible for their faith. Furthermore, you have no power to determine their fate. Definitely, guidance and Divine Facilitation in order to attain faith is in the Hands of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Accordingly, Allah *Glorified is He* says this to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*: '[O Prophet Muhammad], We did not send you to be a

(1) Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in *Dala'il An-Nubuwwa*, (2/450) on the authority of 'Amir Ash-Sh'abi, and it was also narrated by Ahmad in his *Musnad* (4/120). As-Suyuti stated it in his *Ad-Durr Al-Manthur* (4/294) quoting it from Ibn Sa'd in *At-Tabaqat Al-Kubra*.

guardian over them' (*al-Isra'*: 54). This statement is not intended to subjugate or underestimate Prophet Muhammad. On the contrary, this is intended as a mercy to him and a means of comforting him. It is as though Allah is saying to His Prophet, 'O Muhammad, do not burden yourself above your capability'. Allah addresses His Prophet in the same manner in another verse: 'It may be that you torment yourself [O Muhammad] because they will not [accept belief and] become believers' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 3). Allah *Glorified is He* does not blame His Messenger, Muhammad. Absolutely not, He is actually consoling him. In fact, anyone who attentively studies the occasions in which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was admonished finds that they were, in truth, admonishments that were intended to benefit him *peace and blessings be upon him* out of mercy towards him and compassion with him. However, some people mistakenly argue that Allah *Glorified is He* blamed Prophet Muhammad because he had committed an error.

A case in point in this regard is mentioned in Allah's saying: 'He [Prophet Muhammad] frowned and turned away because the blind man came to him. But how do you know? Perhaps he will be purified' (*'Abasa*: 1-3). Allah *Glorified is He* criticizes His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* because he neglected the man who came to him to inquire about Islam and burdened himself with arguing with the notables. It was as though Allah *Glorified is He* was compassionately admonishing Prophet Muhammad not to burden himself with such a difficult mission. The admonishment here is a way of protecting Prophet Muhammad and a way of making matters easy for him.

Another example is also stated in Allah's saying: 'O Prophet! Why do you prohibit [for yourself] that which Allah has made lawful for you, seeking to please your wives? And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful' (*at-Tahrim*: 1) when Prophet Muhammad prohibited himself from doing allowable things. Prohibition entails that one is denied things. Allah *Glorified is He* is criticizing His Messenger, Muhammad, because he had placed an undue constraint upon himself; he had forbidden for himself what Allah has made lawful for him. This resembles exactly the case when a father scolds his son who stays awake late at night studying until he exhausts himself. In essence, these admonishments are for the benefit of Prophet Muhammad and not to dishonour him. Allah says:

وَرَبُّكَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَن فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلَقَدْ فَضَّلْنَا
بَعْضَ النَّبِيِّينَ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَآتَيْنَا دَاوُدَ زَبُورًا

Your Lord knows best about everyone in the heavens and the earth. We gave some prophets more than others: We gave David a book [of Psalms] [55] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 55)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '*A'alam* (knows best)' which is an intensified verb. This indicates profound knowledge. When it is said that Allah *Glorified is He* 'knows best', then those of lesser stature than Him can legitimately be described as just possessing awareness. As such, we say, 'So-and-so is "knowledgeable", but Allah has full knowledge of everything'. Allah *Glorified is He* does not prevent people from employing their intellects in order to discover any of creation's hidden wonders or secrets. Accordingly, this verse means that Allah's Knowledge is not limited to you Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or even to the affairs of all the Muslims; His Knowledge fully encompasses all that exists in the heavens and on earth. His Knowledge is perfect and absolute; not a single atom eludes Him. It is upon the basis of this knowledge that He has decreed the provisions for His creatures and distributed talents among them; each one is given in accordance with what secures his interests.

Accordingly, when you see someone whom Allah has given in scant measure, know that this person does not deserve anything besides what he has. Moreover, you must realize that the only thing that will make him good is that which Allah has allotted for him. In fact, all people are slaves to Allah and completely dependent upon Him. Allah does not take any one of them as an enemy nor is he related to any of them through lineage. Consequently, all people are perfectly equal in relation to Allah. He gives each one in accordance with his readiness to receive the Divine Grant. This even applies to the disbeliever whose heart flagrantly rejects faith. His heart has become engulfed in his hypocrisy to such an extent that he passionately loves it as his lot. Allah *Glorified is He* does not prevent him from that which he loves for himself; in fact, He increases him in it.

It is on account of Allah's Knowledge of what is in the heavens and the earth that He gives His slaves in accordance with what they deserve—in

terms of the affairs in which they have no freewill. Indeed, in relation to these things they are all equal. As for the matters in which they are allowed to exercise a degree of choice, the Creator *Glorified is He* offers people means, materials, faculties, intellects, and power. Accordingly, it is incumbent on every person to make use of these things that have been placed at their disposal in order to elevate their standard of living as much as they are able.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We made some prophets excel others' (*al-Isra'*: 55). Who is the One Who made some prophets excel others in this case? Allah *Glorified is He* is the One who endowed some prophets with a higher status than others. We are not allowed to state that any are better except the ones Allah has stated are better. This is because it is Allah who possesses the ability to reward someone according to the higher status he has. On the other hand, we do not have the ability to reward any one according to the high status they have. This explains why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'None should say that I am better than Yunus (Jonah), the son of *Mata'*'.⁽¹⁾ It is Allah Who grants preference for some over others. It is clearly stated in the Quran that Allah has endowed some prophets with a higher station than others: 'Those messengers—some of them We caused to exceed others. Among them were those to whom Allah spoke, and He raised some of them in degree. And We gave 'Isa (Jesus), the Son of Mary, clear proofs, and We supported him with the Pure Spirit' (*al-Baqara*: 253). This preference is according to Allah's Knowledge. Allah has given *Ulu Al-'Azm* (those of determination from among Allah's Messengers) higher status above others as a result of the hardships and difficulties they underwent in their attempts to call their respective communities to worship the One True God, Allah. Furthermore, they have been elevated on account of the diligence with which they carried Allah's Message and the effort they expended to propagate

(1) Narrated by Muslim in his *Sahih* (2376) on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. In his commentary on *Sahih Muslim*, An-Nawawi said, 'The scholars said that this Hadith of Prophet Muhammad could be interpreted in one of two ways: First, that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made this statement before he knew that he was better than Yunus (Jonah) *peace be upon him*. When he learned that, he said, "I am the master of all of the children of Adam". Second, he said this as a warning to the ignorant; dissuading them from imagining an inherent deficiency in the rank of Yunus (Jonah) *peace be upon him* (15/141).

it. Or perhaps their elevated status is attributed to the long lengths of time they spent among their respective peoples. These are only some of the possible explanations of their elevated status, and Allah alone knows the basis upon which He has favoured them.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And We gave Dawud (David) a book [of Psalms]' (*al-Isra*': 55). Why is Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* the only one for whom Allah mentions the book that was revealed to him along with his name? It is thought that Dawud *peace be upon him* was given dominion in addition to the Scripture; this made him not only a prophet but also a king. However, it seems as though Allah *Glorified is He* is indicating that the preference of Dawud *peace be upon him* is not rooted in his having been a king, but rather in his having been a prophet who received scripture.

In the noble Hadith of Prophet Muhammad it is recorded, 'Indeed, I was given the choice of being a prophet-slave or a prophet-king: I chose to be a prophet-slave'.⁽¹⁾

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ أَدْعُوا الَّذِينَ زَعَمْتُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ فَلَا يَمْلِكُونَ
كُشْفَ الضَّرِّ عَنْكُمْ وَلَا تَحْوِيلًا ﴿٥٦﴾

**Say, 'Call upon those you claim to be deities beside God:
they have no power to remove or avert any harm
from you' [56] (The Quran, *al-Isra*': 56)**

Allah *Glorified is He* says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Say to those who oppose you regarding the Oneness of Allah, "If you are seized by some type of calamity do not seek refuge in the One in Whom you

(1) Narrated by Ahmad in his *Musnad* (2/231) on the authority of Abu Hurayra, who said, 'The Angel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* was sitting with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he looked to the sky and saw an angel descending. To this, Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* said, "Verily, this angel, since he was created, has never descended from heaven before this hour". When he descended he said, "O Muhammad, Allah *Glorified is He* has dispatched me to you. Will you like to be a prophet-king or a messenger-slave?" At this point, Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* said, "O Muhammad show humility before your Lord!" Consequently, he responded, "Of course, a messenger-slave"'.

‘disbelieve’; on the contrary, seek refuge in those you claimed were ‘sharers’ in Allah’s Divinity”. In reality, they will never listen to you’. This is because the human being, by his very nature, does not deceive himself. If they had believed that those whom they were calling as gods besides Allah could benefit them at all, they will not have called upon Allah in whom they ‘disbelieved’ and abandoned those in whom they believed. Why is that?

Indeed, the human being does not rebel or transgress until all of his resources are in order. That is to say: all of his resources have been arranged and organized. However, if one of his resources fails, his ability to foment a rebellion is weakened. Inevitably, he will attempt to compensate for that loss. In the meantime, he will not deceive himself by asking for it from him who does not possess it. On the contrary, he will seek the aid of someone he believes to possess that which he needs. This explains why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And when distress afflicts you in the sea, those whom you call on besides Him [Allah] leave you in the lurch!’ (*al-Isra'*: 67) He *Glorified is He* also says: ‘And when distress afflicts a man he calls upon his Lord, turning to Him frequently...’ (*az-Zumar*: 8). Why is this? Without doubt, it is because that which has afflicted him has enfeebled him and broken his arrogance and pride. Before, when the Divine Obligations were made clear to him, he disbelieved, but now—beset with a calamity and constrained by misfortune—he must be frank with himself: self-deception will not avail him.

In this regard, we gave the analogy of the character that rural dwellers of the past used to refer to as a ‘barber surgeon’. He was responsible for maintaining public health within a given community. At this time, his role was similar to the role now assumed by the physician. If an actual doctor was appointed to a given community, the ‘barber surgeon’ used to strive hard to turn the people against him by broadcasting his (the doctor’s) lack of knowledge and limited background. His objective was to keep the attention of the people focused squarely on himself; in this way, no one will share his earnings with him. In the passing days, however, the ‘barber surgeon’ was confronted with a tribulation: indeed, his son had fallen sick. He had no recourse but to carry his son in the secrecy of the night to the doctor. Nonetheless, when his situation became known to the people, he was ashamed before them.

As such, a person does not deceive himself during a time of calamity nor does he tell lies to himself. Say to them, 'If you are seized by hardships and adversities, seek the aid of those whom you claim exist as gods'. They will never respond to this invitation and they will never call on them from their hearts. Although, if they did call on those deities who they claim are gods, they (those false deities) could never relieve them of their hardship or suffering: '...they do not have the power to remove any distress from you' (*al-Isra'*: 56). The Quranic statement: '...nor to transfer it [elsewhere]' (*al-Isra'*: 56) means that they (those false deities) are incapable of changing your situation from one of hardship to one of benefit, blessing or mercy. The meaning could also be: they are incapable of moving this state of hardship away from you to your enemies. This means that they do not possess the ability to do this or that.

Allah *Glorified is He* instructs Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on how to establish proof against them in order to clarify that they are severely mistaken and only deceiving themselves. They oppose their innate senses and instincts. If they are afflicted with a disaster—one that shakes them to their very cores—they do not seek refuge with their 'gods'. Indeed, they know that those 'gods' do not possess the ability to benefit or harm them. They know that those 'gods' cannot hear them. And if they were—for the sake of argument—able to hear them, they still will never be able to respond to them. On the Day of Judgment they will disavow their association of other partners along with Allah (*shirk*). In fact, they will seek refuge in Allah; it is He alone who possesses the ability to remove sufferings and adversities from them.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says⁽¹⁾:

(1) *As for the occasion of the revelation of this verse, it is narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (3030) in the Book of Quranic Exegesis that Abdullah ibn Masud Allah be pleased with him said, 'There was a group of human beings who used to worship a group of jinn. However, when the group of the jinn converted to Islam, those jinn worshippers persisted in worshipping them. Hence, the verse was revealed'.*

أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ يَبْتَغُونَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمُ الْوَسِيلَةَ أَيُّهُمْ أَقْرَبُ
وَيَرْجُونَ رَحْمَتَهُ وَيَخَافُونَ عَذَابَهُ إِنَّ عَذَابَ رَبِّكَ كَانَ مَحْذُورًا ﴿٥٧﴾

Those [angels] they pray to are themselves seeking a way to their Lord, even those who are closest to Him. They hope for His mercy and fear His punishment. The punishment of your Lord is much to be feared [57] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 57)

These are the ones whom you consider 'gods' whom you take as associates in Allah's Divinity and who you worship with Allah. However, you should know that these (beings) are also Allah's slaves. They strive to be close to Him and they seek the means by which they might approach Him. This description includes the Messiah (Christ) *peace be upon him* who you take as a partner with Allah—and in exactly the same way, the angels are also Allah's slaves. The Quran clearly states: 'Never did the Christ feel too proud to be Allah's slave, nor the angels who are near unto Him' (*an-Nisa'*: 172). These illustrious personages do not disdain or reject the fact that they are Allah's slaves. To be sure, they only desire to become close to Him *Glorified is He*. How then can you direct your worship and your devotion towards them and they are themselves slaves?

Allah's saying: '...seeking the means by which they might approach their Lord' (*al-Isra'*: 57) means that their ardent goal is to foster a close relationship with Allah *Glorified is He*. His saying: '...even those who are the closest to Him' indicates that each time one of them becomes closer to Allah he only becomes more desirous of being closer to Allah than any of his counterparts, and therefore he continues to approach Him. Indeed, if those who are closest to Allah desire to be nearer to Him, what is to be said of those who are distant from Allah?

As for Allah's saying: 'The Punishment of your Lord is truly something to be feared' (*al-Isra'*: 57), it means that it is absolutely necessary that Allah's punishment be regarded seriously and that one should abstain from all things that lead to it. When punishment is from Allah, no one can dodge it nor is there any place to flee from it. Furthermore, the severity or weakness of a given punishment is directly related to the one who is inflicting it. This means

that if the punishment is attributed to Allah, it will undoubtedly entail severe pain. There is no one who can stand it. Allah *Glorified is He* clearly mentions in the Quran: 'His seizing is most painful, most severe' (*Hud*: 102).

Allah *Glorified is He* has already clarified the issue of Divine Unity in many verses in the Quran. What is more, He did not request that we attest to the truth of the Divine Unity until after He had attested to it Himself *Glorified is He* and until after the angels and those in possession of sure knowledge had attested to it. Allah says: 'Allah (Himself) bears witness that there is no god save Him. And the angels and the men of learning (also bear witness)' (*Al-'Imran*: 18). This is a testimony from Allah *Glorified is He* Himself concerning His Own Essence. The testimony of the angels is the testimony due to experiencing and seeing this reality. As for the testimony of those who have sure knowledge, it is a testimony based on deduction. In all, these three very compelling forms of testimonies were stated before we were requested to bear witness and testify to the Divine Unity ourselves.

It is upon the basis of this testimony that Allah *Glorified is He* exercises His Authority and Power in creation. As long as there is no deity besides Him, it is for Him to command anything: 'Be!' And (without delay) it is! He says this because he knows that there is no deity besides Him. On the basis of this principle, He issues the decisive judgment concerning all affairs, and He changes things from one state to another. In fact, if these three testimonies are valid and true, the matter is closed. On the other hand, if these testimonies are not true and there is, in fact, another god, where is he? If he is unaware of things, then he is an inactive god. Needless to say, this characteristic is not appropriate for the rank of Godhood. But if he is aware of the situation on earth, why has he not made his right (to be worshipped as a god) known?

As such, this claim of Divine Unity has been preserved for the Lord *Glorified is He* and no one else has ventured to call it his. It must be considered as belonging solely to Allah until someone dares to challenge His position.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say, "If there were—as some people assert—[other] deities side by side with Him, surely [even] they will have to strive to find a way to the Owner of the Throne"' (*al-Isra'*: 42).

That is to say: if there were other gods within the creation, they [these gods] will have sought that god through whom everything was organized well and orderly, talking to him about this 'divinity' or trying to get closer to him.

The Lord then goes on to say:

وَأِنْ مِنْ قَرْيَةٍ إِلَّا نَحْنُ مُهْلِكُوهَا قَبْلَ يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ
 أَوْ مُعَذِّبُوهَا عَذَابًا شَدِيدًا كَانَ ذَلِكَ فِي الْكِتَابِ مَسْطُورًا ﴿٥٨﴾

There is no community We shall not destroy, or punish severely, before the Day of Resurrection – this is written in the Book [58] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 58)

As soon as you hear '...there is not a town but...' (*al-Isra'*: 58), you can be assured that the style of address being employed here is one that contains a negation and an affirmation. The meaning is: There is no community but Allah *Glorified is He* will destroy or inflict with a dreadful punishment before the Day of Judgment. However, does this judgment apply to all towns? We respond by stating, 'No, indeed not; for this is an absolute judgment'. In the Quran, absolute judgments are qualified by other Quranic statements. Concerning this, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'This is because your Lord will not destroy towns unjustly, while their people were unaware [of the Truth]' (*al-An'am*: 131). Allah *Glorified is He* also states: 'Your Lord will not destroy any town without cause if its people were acting righteously...' (*Hud*: 117).

These verses intend to clarify the exception to the general principle that was previously mentioned. Moreover, they restrict it to certain limits. In this sense, the meaning becomes: There is no town whose people are not unaware of Allah's Way and do not advocate good that will be spared from destruction or Allah's Wrath.

Concerning Allah's saying: 'And there is not a town but We will destroy it before the Day of Resurrection or chastise it with a severe chastisement...' (*al-Isra'*: 58), the words: '...We will destroy it...' (*al-Isra'*: 58) refer to the kind of torture that will exterminate them, leaving none of them alive. The words: '...or chastise it...' (*al-Isra'*: 58) refer to torture without extermination.

Chastisement is the first stage. If it achieves the desired result, namely, that it makes people return to the correct course of action, then all is well and this ends the matter. On the other hand, if, after chastisement, they are not convinced or deterred and they stubbornly persist in their wrong actions, they will meet their doom. This is spelled out clearly within the Statement of the Lord: 'Allah presents the example of a town that was secure and at ease, with provisions coming to it abundantly from all places. Then it became ungrateful for Allah's Blessings, so Allah afflicted it with the garment of famine and fear for what its people had done' (*an-Nahl*: 112).

In reality, the present contains various illustrations of this issue. It is inevitable that every township that engages in corruption and vice will garner some punishment. The illustrative examples before us are sufficiently clear; there is no need to elaborate—we do not want to 'scrape the scab off our wounds'.

It is natural that punishment will precede complete destruction. To be sure, punishment represents real sufferings. Moreover, a person is able to feel and sense punishment. As for destruction, it represents the complete annihilation of life. As such, it precludes the possibility of sensing the punishment.

By studying the respective histories of past nations we begin to recognize that there is a long-standing tradition of the unrighteous being destroyed. The respective communities of Nuh (Noah) and Lut (Lot) *peace be upon them*, as well as 'Ad and Thamud were all consumed by the Wrath of Allah, which cannot be averted from the people who disbelieve. However, in each of the aforementioned cases, the wrath that descended upon those peoples was one of total devastation. As a matter of fact, the prophets *peace be upon them*—at that time—were not requested to carry weapons in order to propagate their Messages. Their only responsibility was to convey the Message; the Lord assumed the responsibility of chastising the non-compliant. This has one exception: if the believing followers of a prophet asked for permission from Allah to fight to spread the Word of Allah. This was asked by the followers of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: '[O Prophet Muhammad], consider the leaders of the children of Israel who came after Musa (Moses), when they said to one of their prophets, "Set up a king for us and we shall fight in Allah's Cause" He said, "Is it not possible, if you were commanded to fight,

that you will refuse to fight?" They said, "How could we refuse to fight in Allah's Cause when we and our children have been driven out of our homeland?" Yet when they were commanded to fight, all but a few of them turned away...' (*al-Baqara*: 246). This is how the children of Israel requested to fight and demanded permission to engage in an armed struggle. Nonetheless, their prophet warned them; he was fearful of making them responsible for what they had earnestly requested and then watching them fail to comply with the orders they had been given. As fate had it, this is what actually took place, and there only remained with him a meagre fighting force. What is more is that after only a short while, even that meagre fighting force began to slowly diminish, one after the other. As a matter of fact, their determination, at that moment, was not yet enough to push them to engage in armed struggle for the Cause of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Clearly, the responsibility of the Messenger was to convey the Message. It was the One in the heavens that assumed the responsibility of punishing those who disregarded the Message or disobeyed it with severity that devastated them to such an extent that not a single soul among them was spared.

As for the community of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* our Lord has mercifully spared us of such a punishment. Allah says: 'But Allah will not send them a punishment while you [Prophet] are in their midst, nor will He punish them if they sought forgiveness ...' (*al-Anfal*: 33).

This is an example of how Allah *Glorified is He* distinguishably honoured and was especially generous with His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Indeed, Allah did not seize his people with a demolishing punishment. But why did He not? If the truth be told, it was because their prophet was the Final Messenger and the Seal of the Prophets. Allah *Glorified is He* was about to make them instrumental in the process of carrying the Message of Prophet Muhammad and assisting him in his mission. These people were destined to become key figures in the effort to propagate the Way of Allah *Glorified is He* throughout the vast regions of the earth. This is because the Lord, when He sent His Way to earth, had already foreshadowed the negligence that will characterize the people's treatment of it, as well as their habit of following in the steps of the previous nations. These are two points that hinder people from

proceeding in the Path of Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[O Prophet], when your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, "Am I not your Lord?" and they replied, "Yes, we bear witness to this", lest you say on the Day of Resurrection, "We were not aware of this", or lest you say, "It was our forefathers who, before us, ascribed partners to Allah, and we are only the descendants who came after them..."' (*al-A'raf*: 172-173).

Clearly, the Lord has outlined for us how the human being will wander blindly and eventually deviate from the way. The underlying cause for this will be either heedlessness or the habit of blindly following evil and unworthy models. The first person to learn from Allah *Glorified is He* was Adam *peace be upon him* and he faithfully discharged his responsibility of conveying the Way of Allah *Glorified is He* to his offspring. Nevertheless, with the passage of time negligence towards some of this Way began to creep in as the result of the love of vain desires and passions that had been made an aspect of the human being's nature. It is in fact these desires that removed the human beings from the Way of their Lord. Given the nature of deviance, if it takes place in one generation, it will only worsen in the following generation. Certainly, the current generation has two factors that make it unable to be upright: its own negligence and the habit of following the example of the previous generation. As such, with the passing of successive generations and the increased heedlessness of the Way of Allah *Glorified is He* that accompanied each generation, it was necessary for the Lord to send someone from among the supporters of the prophets to make people aware of their transgression.

Hence, the community of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has been chosen to be the best of nations that were raised up for the benefit of humanity (as exemplars for people): '[Believers], you are the best community brought forth for people...' (*Al-Imran*: 110). Why is this the case? Allah says: '...you order what is right, forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah...' (*Al-Imran*: 110).

The favoured position of this community emanates from the responsibility they bear in terms of carrying the Message. Allah *Glorified is He* has conferred a unique honour upon the community of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings*

be upon him: He has given the responsibility of spreading this Message to each individual who believes in the Message, until the Day of Judgment. Indeed, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed the message among his contemporaries within his community. After that, it was upon the community to convey the Message among the following generations. This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* stands as a witness over us; and we stand as witnesses over mankind.

Within the noble Hadith of Prophet Muhammad we find, 'May Allah make his face shine the person who hears what I say and conveys it to others exactly as he has heard it (i.e., both the meaning and the words), for perhaps the one to whom the knowledge is conveyed understands it better than the one who heard it in the first place'.⁽¹⁾

This is how the favour of this community is retained; it is inextricably linked to the faithfulness with which it carries the Message of its prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In the light of the fact that there will be no prophet after him, this is a responsibility they must bear. Highlighting the importance of the role that the Muslim community must play in the conveyance and spread of the Message at every time and place, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* mentioned to us, 'Each of you is posted as a guard on the gates of this religion. Beware lest the religion is attacked through the gate where you are posted'. This is the general meaning of what Prophet Muhammad said.

Consequently, every Muslim either represents the religion successfully or misrepresents it. His conduct and behaviour in the community are watched and observed. He is a representative of Islam and one of its ambassadors. His task is to comply with this responsibility and take it into consideration before doing anything. He should fulfil this responsibility in the best way possible in order to become an attractive example of what it means to lead an Islamic way of life and for his face to shine, as the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad mentioned above states, due to teaching this faith to others.

(1) Narrated by Ahmad in his *Musnad* (1/437), At-Tirmidhi in his *Sunnan* (2657, 2658), Ibn Majah in his *Sunnan* (232) and Humaydi (1/47) from a Hadith that was narrated by 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ad.

You are guarding one of the gates, and you must assume this responsibility by creating a good impression of the faith and submitting wholeheartedly to the rules of Islam. If you achieve this, you will have become a means of attracting those who are considering the idea of embracing the faith and are viewing the brilliance of Allah's Way from afar.

Some people find it agreeable to judge Islam on the basis of the misdeeds of its adherents; they give a verdict on Islam that is founded upon the conduct of those who are affiliated with it. This is a mistake. Anyone who wants to get an accurate impression of Islam must take it from the sources of the faith: The Quran and the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. If you, for instance, see someone who is affiliated with Islam who is a thief, do not say, 'This is Islam!' This will not be correct at all because Islam has proscribed theft. In fact, it has specified a punishment to be carried out on those who steal. In essence, it is not appropriate for anyone to be regarded as an absolute standard upon which Islam is judged.

This explains why scholars of the highest stature and thinkers who engage in an investigative study of the Islamic faith do not focus their attention on the actions of the Muslims and their present condition. Rather, they derive their conception of Islam from its original sources. Some of them, including the Frenchman René Guenon, have said, 'All praise be to Allah *Glorified is He* Who guided me to Islam before I came in contact with any Muslim'. In reality, it is lamentable that if he were to consider our current condition, he will have come to a different conclusion.

As such, most of those who look upon Islam with a balanced outlook, while being fair-minded, will be guided to it. Nonetheless, there are those who look upon Islam with a fair and balanced outlook but the intent of believing and finding faith has been removed from their hearts. Even if their intellects are convinced with Islam, the difference that exists between the matters of the intellect and the matters of the heart is enormous.

There is one writer among these non-Muslim researchers of Islam who is responsible for authoring a book about history's great personages entitled 'The One Hundred Most Influential Personalities, the Greatest of Them Being Muhammad Ibn 'Abdullah'. In truth, it is not a book that is concerned with

faith. It is merely a cursory reading of history, making stops at intermittent points to highlight the people who have made significant impacts on the history of mankind. He found that they were one hundred personalities and concluded that when all things are taken into consideration, the greatest of these personalities was Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This is even though Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not receive any education at school, nor did he graduate from a notable university or undergo private instruction from a teacher.

Did this author not ask himself, 'How did Muhammad gain this pre-eminence among history's notable figures? Why does he, in fact, deserve to be afforded this pre-eminence?' Certainly, you have mentioned the outstanding talents of each of the personalities along with the sources of these talents; whether a specific method of education, term of study in a certain university, or a period of research, study and learning from knowledgeable instructors. Why, then, did you neglect to mention the sources of Prophet Muhammad's talents? You know that he was an illiterate man that was reared in a community in which illiteracy was widespread; is that not correct? This is an indication that this researcher undertook this study with his head but not with his heart.

Let us return to the issue of chastisement and destruction. Indeed, it has caused disagreements between lawmakers with regards to establishing stoning as the legally required punishment for adultery (sexual intercourse) committed by one who is or has been married and lashing as the punishment for fornication committed by one who has never been married. One group in the debate opined that lashing is established by the Quran. As for stoning, they view it as being established by the habit of Prophet Muhammad. This is why they say, 'Stoning the adulterer is a habit of Prophet Muhammad'. This is a mistaken view; it is far from the truth. To be sure, there is a marked difference between a ruling whose evidence is contained in a Hadith of Prophet Muhammad and a ruling that is itself a habit of Prophet Muhammad. The ruling whose evidence is contained in a Hadith actually carries the status of a legal obligation; however, the source of its being an obligation is taken from a Hadith of Prophet Muhammad. This is the case with the issue we are currently discussing. For an additional example, consider the Sunset Prayer which contains three units of

Prayer; its performance is a legal obligation, but its evidence comes from a Hadith of Prophet Muhammad. As for the ruling that is a *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad, its legal status is fixed because it was a habit of the Prophet which means that the one who performs it will be rewarded, but the one who does not perform it is not punished. This is like the three glorifications of Allah *Glorified is He* that we recite during the bowing posture of the Prayer. This means that stoning the adulterer is a legal obligation, but its evidence is contained in a Hadith. The role of the Hadith, in this case, is to give evidence that something is an obligation, not to lay down something as a non-obligatory habit or *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad.

Consequently, whoever says that stoning as a punitive measure for adulterers is not dealt with explicitly in the Book of Allah *Glorified is He* we say to him, 'Correct, its evidence is in a Hadith, which is—lest we forget—the second most authoritative source within Islamic legislation'. This also needs to be said to those who claim that the Quran is the only source of Islamic legislation. The Quran itself has spoken on this issue: '...so accept whatever the Messenger [Muhammad] gives you, and abstain from whatever he forbids you...' (*al-Hashr*: 7).

From this, we are able to conclude that the actions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are as authoritative as the Quranic text. The question then becomes, 'Did they implement the punishment of stoning during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or not?' In point of fact, they did implement the punishment of stoning during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.⁽¹⁾ If someone

(1) Narrated by Muslim in his *Sahih* (16/1691) from a Hadith that was narrated by Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him who said, 'A member of the Muslim community approached the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* while he was in the mosque. He called out to him and said, "O Messenger of Allah! Verily, I have committed illicit sex". Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* turned aside from him, but he faced him again and said, "O Messenger of Allah! Verily, I have committed illicit sex". Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* disregarded him again and again until this had continued for four times. Once he had confessed four times, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* summoned him and asked, "Are you mentally ill?" He responded, "No". He then asked, "Are you married?" "Yes", the man responded. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* finally said, "Take him and stone him"'.

wants to claim that this is not a direct textual reference to stoning, we say, 'An action is even more compelling as evidence than a direct textual reference. A text could be interpreted in more than one way, but an action is clear and not amenable to various interpretations'.

Additional evidence of the obligation of stoning is found in Allah's Statement concerning implementing punishments on slave-women: '...then if they are guilty of indecency, they shall suffer half the punishment which is (inflicted) upon free women...' (*an-Nisa'*: 25). On the basis of this, they say, 'Stoning—if it were the prescribed punishment for a free married woman—cannot be divided in half. Thus, the prescribed punishment that is being referred to, here, cannot be stoning'. We say to them, 'You did not make any distinction between stoning and other customary types of corporeal punishment. Stoning is a death penalty, whereas a corporeal punishment is the infliction of pain to a living person that is able to sense and feel that pain. The specific type of corporeal punishment being referred to here in this verse is lashing.

Consequently, the Lord's statement: '...then if they are guilty of indecency, they shall suffer half the punishment which is (inflicted) upon free women...' (*an-Nisa'*: 25) is, in fact, a reference to lashing, which can be divided in half. Moreover, if this were intended to be a general ruling the verse will have read, 'They shall suffer half which is upon free women'. That is, Allah mentioning: '...the punishment...' (*an-Nisa'*: 25) is evidence of the obligatory status of stoning; a death penalty which free and bondwomen are equal in its regard.

In the same manner, we can see how Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* made a distinction between different types of threats, threatening to punish and then threatening to destroy, when he checked the ranks of the birds and noticed that the Hoopoe was absent: '...I will punish him severely, or kill him...' (*an-Naml*: 21).

One might ask, 'Is it inescapable that every township given to wrongdoing and aggression will be punished or destroyed before the Day of Judgment?' Yes, it is inevitable that they will be visited by some measure of punishment or destruction. In fact, if Allah *Glorified is He* delayed all of the punishment that they deserve until the Day of Judgment, oppression will become unmanageably widespread and will nearly consume the whole of creation.

When people notice an oppressor carousing through life and enjoying its pleasures in spite of his wrongdoings, it becomes an enticement for them towards doing wrong. On the other hand, if they see that the oppressor has been completely consumed by the evil outcome of his actions: He has been overcome with calamities; this will restrain them from committing wrongdoings. They will be able to easily conclude that the end result of oppression and wrongdoing is ruinous. The oppressor will not slink away from retribution on earth before being punished in the Hereafter. Nevertheless, if the punishment of an oppressor is delayed until the Hereafter, despair is the only lot of the one who does not believe in the Next Life.

For this reason, when one of the oppressive heads of state in Eastern *Sham* (Mediterranean region) passed away, for whom—despite his oppressive tenure—the people had never witnessed him experience any significant measure of hardship or calamity during the life of this world, one of those present said, ‘There is a realm that transcends this realm. It is a realm in which the performer of righteous deeds is rewarded and in which the wrongdoer is requited. It is impossible for an oppressive wrongdoer to completely escape punishment’.

During the course of my debates with the Communists in Brussels, I said to them, ‘Indeed, you adopted a hard-line stance in dealing with dissenting Capitalists and those who supported feudalism, in 1917 and afterwards’. They responded, ‘Indeed, they deserve even more punishment than that; they were guilty of this and that’. I said, ‘When did they start doing these things?’ ‘They did this for as long as they were alive’, they answered. I re-joined, ‘And if you punish your contemporaries from among them for their wrong actions which they copied from their predecessors, how did you punish their predecessors? What punishment did you give them?’ They replied, ‘Well, we did not see them (we were not alive at their time and so we were not able to punish them)’. At this, I said to them, ‘Then you must believe in the Day of Judgment. It is the time when the previous generation you speak of will be punished. Even if they have escaped punishment in the life of this world, the Hereafter will come and “set the record straight”’. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Another punishment awaits the evildoers, though most of them do not realize it...’ (*at-Tur*: 47).

At this point, I ask that you re-focus your attention on the verse that we are currently interpreting: 'And there is not a town but We will destroy it before the Day of Resurrection or chastise it with a severe chastisement; this is written in the Divine Ordinance' (*al-Isra'*: 58).

In seeking its explanation, consult the exegetical work of Nasafi⁽¹⁾. In it you will find many illustrative examples that elucidate the meaning of this verse. He says, 'Such-and-such a town will be beset with such-and-such. Or this or that village will be plagued by one thing or another'. Astonishingly, the reality came to pass in accordance with what he said. Within these discourses he discusses the future of Egypt—to which he dedicated quite a lengthy passage. Actually, I think he predicted what has been taking place in Egypt since the year 1952. An expressive part of what he said reads as such, 'A man from Juhayna will enter Egypt. Woe unto its people, woe unto the people of As-Sham (Eastern Mediterranean region), woe unto the inhabitants of Africa, and woe unto the Saharan desert dwellers. However, he—the man from Juhayna—will not enter *Al-Quds* (Jerusalem)'⁽²⁾. I strongly recommend that you read this passage of *Nasafi*.

Afterwards, the Lord says: '...this is written in the Divine Ordinance' (*al-Isra'*: 58). This expression means: Recorded and transcribed in the Preserved Tablet. The Lord does not say: '...this is written in the Divine Ordinance' (*al-Isra'*: 58), but the events unfold and entail something different from what has been written. On the contrary, it is inevitable that the Lord will substantiate these Quranic declarations of truth with realities and events that actually unfold and happen.

Then Allah says⁽³⁾:

(1) *Nasafi* was *Aba Barakat 'Abdullah ibn Ahmad An-Nasafi Allah be pleased with them* (d.701 A.H.). His work of Quranic exegesis is entitled: *Madarak At-Tanzil fi Haqa'iq At-Ta'wil*.

(2) This is a direct quote from the exegetical work of *Nasafi* (2/318) in the edition that was published by *Dar Al-Fikr*. This particular passage was narrated by *Muqatil* and is mentioned in the books of *Ad-Dahhak*. Here, *Sheikh Ash-Sh'arawi* has quoted the text verbatim.

(3) *The occasion surrounding the revelation of this verse is related on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas, who said, 'The people of Mecca asked Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him to transform the hill of Safa into gold. They also asked him to shift the mountains and make them verdant and arable. Allah said to him, 'If you like, you may=*

وَمَا مَنَعَنَا أَنْ نُرْسِلَ بِالْآيَاتِ إِلَّا أَنْ كَذَّبَ بِهَا الْأَوَّلُونَ وَءَاثِنَا ثُمُودَ
الْنَّاقَةَ مُبْصِرَةً فَظَلَمُوا بِهَا وَمَا نُرْسِلُ بِالْآيَاتِ إِلَّا تَخْوِيفًا ﴿٥٩﴾

**Nothing prevents Us from sending miraculous signs, except
the fact that previous peoples denied them. We gave the
people of Thamud the she-camel as a clear sign, yet they
maltreated it. We send signs only to give warning [59]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 59)**

The word '*ayat*' (miraculous signs) is the plural of '*ayah*' ('sign' in this verse); it refers to an amazing occurrence which commands attention and captures one's attention. In terms of these '*ayat*', they are either manifest in the wonders of creation which make us realise how great the Power of the Great Orchestrator is, some examples of such wonders being mentioned in Allah's saying: 'The night and the day, and the sun and the moon are only a few of His signs...' (*Fussilat*: 37); or the word '*ayat*' can refer to the miraculous signs which indicate the truthfulness of a Messenger in what he conveys from his Lord. Additionally, the word '*aya*' can be used to refer to individual parts (verses) of the Quranic revelation—which have been termed as the Bearer of Heavenly Injunctions.

Essentially, this leaves us with three designations for the word '*ayat*': The wonders of creation, miraculous signs, and the verses of the Quran. We may ask, which of them is indicated in the verse: 'Nothing has prevented Us from sending miraculous signs (*ayat*) except [Our Knowledge] that previous peoples denied them...' (*al-Isra'*: 59)?

The wonders of creation are omnipresent and do not need to be sent. The same can be said of the Quranic revelation. The only remaining possibility is the miraculous signs. However, they too are present; every prophet was given a miracle that coincided with the specific genius of his people. The miracle of

= *take your time with them and perhaps We will choose certain individuals among them (to have faith), or you may give them what they want. However, if they disbelieve after receiving what they want, they will be destroyed in the same manner that those before them were destroyed'. He replied, 'No, I will choose to take my time with them'. At this, Allah revealed: 'And nothing has prevented us from sending miraculous signs except [Our knowledge] that previous peoples denied them...' (al-Isra': 59).*

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* resembled but was superior to magic, which was a field at which the children of Israel excelled. In the same manner, the miracles of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* were medical in nature; this was something which his people practiced extremely well.

The miracle of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* entailed linguistic excellence, eloquence and clarity in verbal expression. Indeed, the Arabs did not have any talent beside this one. The Quran challenged them with something they knew well and in which they excelled. This was because it will be more compelling and commanding evidence for them.

Returning to our initial question, 'What is the intended meaning of the *ayat* that Allah *Glorified is He* has prevented from them?' These *ayat* (signs) refer to the other miracles that they were requesting. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'They say, "We will not believe 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 gush forth 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 ascent until you send a real book down for us to read...'"' (*al-Isra'*: 90-93).

Anyone who attentively surveys these suggestions put forward by the people of Mecca will find that they are extremely remote from the type of miracles that are primarily required to keep Prophet Muhammad firm, to establish his trustworthiness or to clarify the truthfulness of his Message and his reliability in conveying the Message from Allah *Glorified is He*. These types of miracles have to be ones his nation is able to perform and in which his people shine and have experience. His was a community of the spoken word, eloquence, and communication; did they have experience in causing springs to gush from the earth? Will the sky falling upon them in pieces be suitable evidence for them of the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad being a Messenger? Or is it simply a stubborn argument and a sign of their proud reluctance to accept the Truth? In essence, the people of Mecca sat idly requesting signs and demanding miracles, while in reality the Lord sends down miracles as He chooses. It is not for anyone to suggest to Allah *Glorified is He* what miracle He

should send down or to compel Him to do anything. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say, "If Allah had so willed, I will not have recited it to you, nor will He have made it known to you. I lived a whole lifetime among you before it came to me. Will you not then understand?"' (Yunus: 16).

The Lord is capable of sending down that which they requested of miraculous signs. To be sure, He is not overcome by anything. Nor is there anything which is too cumbersome or burdensome for Him. The truth is that humankind has a past history of rejecting miraculous signs.

Allah then says: '...We gave the people of Thamud the she-camel as a clear, visible sign, yet they maltreated it...' (*al-Isra'*: 59). The word '*mubseratan*' in the phrase: '...as a clear, visible sign...' (*al-Isra'*: 59) implies that the sign of the she-camel was obvious and clear. The people of Thamud requested a specific miracle.⁽¹⁾ Allah *Glorified is He* responded to them and sent down a miracle unto them. They did not just haughtily deny the faith and disbelieve in the miracle they had requested, they did in fact do worse than that: They sinned against the very miracle they had been sent. They gathered around the she-camel, treated it roughly and harshly, and finally hamstrung it. It is as though Allah says, 'This is the past account of Thamud which prevented Us from responding to the people of Mecca in their request for the miracle they suggested not because We were unable to give them what they had asked for'.

Concerning the she-camel, the Lord says that it was '*mubsirah*': '...a clear, visible sign...' (*al-Isra'*: 59) in order to give some indication as to how clear and convincing it was. This is identical to Allah's statement: '...We have made the sign of the day visible, [a time for] seeing...' (*al-Isra'*: 12). He uses the word '*mubsirah*' (lit. 'seeing') Is the *aya* (sign) of the day *mubsirah* ('visible', lit. 'seeing'), or does it give one the ability to see during it? In

(1) Ibn Kathir within his work of *Quranic exegesis* (2/228) wrote, 'They asked Saleh (Shelah) to bring them a sign. The suggestion that they posited was that a fattened she-camel be made to emerge from a solid rock. What is more, they even designated a specific rock—which they referred to as 'Al-Katiba'—in one of the quarters of the desert mounts (as the place where they wanted to see this happen). Furthermore, they wanted the she-camel to emerge unto them bearing a young camel. That is to say: pregnant with her child and exhausted from the pains of pregnancy. In actual fact, what they requested came to them as they had requested it: The rock began to stir and out of the middle of the rock came a she-camel, without blemish and with her young one moving by her side.'

ancient times, people used to think that human being's ability to see was based on rays which emanated from his eyes onto the visible object that he was viewing. This, they believed, was what produced vision. It was thus believed until Ibn Al-Haytham came and established its flaws. He clarified that human beings are able to capture a visual image of something when rays which emanate from the visible object meet the eyes. This is evidenced by the fact that you can see something when it is clearly exposed to light but not when it is shrouded in darkness. This understanding is what enables us to say that it is the sign of the day which is *mubsirah* (visible, [a time for] seeing): in fact, it is its rays that enable vision.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...We send signs only to frighten and deter' (*al-Isra'*: 59).

This is saying: We send signs (*ayat*) other than miracles for the purpose of frightening and deterring the disbelievers and the obstinately rebellious. For example, the people of Mecca persecuted Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and openly—even brazenly—planned to carry out his assassination. Allah *Glorified is He* made their efforts of no benefit and they began to realise that if they killed him, his family will rise to avenge his death. It was at this point that they hatched another plot to murder him at night. They decided to take one hardy youth from each tribe and command them all to strike Prophet Muhammad, all at once.

Nevertheless, the Lord made Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* aware of their plot and rescued him from their treachery. They also prepared some paranormal measures to get rid of him, but Allah *Glorified is He* was overlooking their scheme. Allah *Glorified is He* informed His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of what they had planned for him. In this manner, their brazen attempts at harming him were rendered unsuccessful and their covert schemes at harming him were made useless. In the same way, means of harming him using magic were completely fruitless. Every attempt that they concocted was met with failure. With this, they realised that there was no way they could impede the progress of this mission in any way. They began to realise that the only way to have peace was by having faith, and following the caravan of faith was the most expedient route to peace.

In essence, the Lord has many signs (*ayat*). They come with the purpose of reprimanding those who claim that the faith is not true and of frightening them with what became of their predecessors who also 'gave the lie' to the Messengers. These are people whom Allah *Glorified is He* seized with a mighty force. From among the signs (*ayat*) that have come with the expressed purpose of frightening and deterring, we have what has been mentioned in this Statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'And We punished each one of them for their sins: some We struck with a violent storm; some were overcome by a sudden blast; some We made the earth swallow; and some We drowned. It was not Allah who wronged them, but they wronged themselves' (*al-'Ankabut*: 40).

All of these signs (*ayat*) were sent by Allah *Glorified is He* to the people who rejected faith. Each one was according to what was suitable for them.

Addressing Prophet Muhammad, Allah then says:

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لَكَ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ أَحَاطَ بِالنَّاسِ وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الرُّؤْيَا الَّتِي أَرَيْنَاكَ إِلَّا فِتْنَةً لِلنَّاسِ
وَالشَّجَرَةَ الْمَلْعُونَةَ فِي الْقُرْآنِ وَنُخَوِّفُهُمْ فَمَا يَزِيدُهُمْ إِلَّا طُغْيَانًا كَبِيرًا

[Prophet], We have told you that your Lord knows all about human beings. The vision We showed you was only a test for people, as was the cursed tree [mentioned] in the Quran.

We warn them, but this only increases their insolence [60]

(The Quran, *al-Isra*': 60)

This is saying, 'Remember! O Muhammad—so that your Companions can remember with you—when we said to you, "Indeed, your Lord completely encompasses men and women". Therefore, it is not possible for them to undertake any action or say anything of which Allah *Glorified is He* has no knowledge. To be sure, encompassing something implies a thorough knowledge of all of its various aspects. As long as the affair is characterized as such, your heart, O Muhammad, should be at rest. Be assured that the extent of their harm towards you will be limited to reckless threats and fruitless plans, even if they make use of the paranormal jinn. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* encompasses them, and He will render their efforts completely futile and suffocate them within their own plot. For this reason, when the Lord issues the challenge to the disbelievers to bring a verse like the Quran, He challenged

the jinn as well. He says: 'Say, "Even if all mankind and jinn came together to produce something like this Quran, they could not produce anything like it, however much they helped each other"' (al-Isra': 88).

During that time, there was a widely held superstition, among the Arabs, that maintained that everyone who possessed some extraordinary talent was receiving inspiration from a devil. What is more, they even claimed that these devils all resided in a valley called Wadi Abqar (the Valley of Ingenuity) that was located in the Arabian Peninsula. This is the background in which the Quran challenged them to come forward and contest the inimitability of the Quran with the help of the devils inspiring them.

This is the manner in which the Lord consoled His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He completely encompasses all people; He knows their outward actions as well as their inward intentions, what they reveal and what they conceal. Thus, with the consolation of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the souls of all the believers also became calm.

This is a manifestation of how Allah takes care of and sustains the entire Universe. It is this sustainability that we refer to when refuting the philosophers; those who aver that the Creator only manifested His Power and Authority in creation on one occasion: when He created the laws that govern creation. 'It is these natural laws that truly govern affairs on earth', this group of philosophers maintain, 'It is they that control the outcome of events'.

Refuting this position is really a simple matter. If it is really the natural laws that control the universe, we should not see any divergence from the course of those laws within creation. This implies that all of creation is run mechanically; hence, there should be absolutely no departure from the established norms. As such, the occurrence of divergences is an indication of the existence of a force that is in control and capable of defying these laws. An example of this is the fire that was ignited to burn the Prophet and friend of Allah *Glorified is He* Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. Was rescuing Ibrahim from the fire the main point in the story, the point that aimed to increase Islam (submission to Allah) and make it stronger? No, the goal was not simply to rescue Ibrahim *peace be upon him*. If this was the goal, then Allah *Glorified is He* will not have allowed them to apprehend him in the first place.

Or Allah *Glorified is He* could have sent a rain cloud to douse the flames of the fire—and thus rescue Ibrahim *peace be upon him*. However, the Lord wanted to display an *Aya* (sign) for them which could serve as an indication that the laws that they assumed natural and inalterable can be defied. For this reason, He allowed them to set the fire alight, physically arrest Ibrahim *peace be upon him* and cast him in the fire. They then saw him as he stood in the middle of the fire. Thus, they had no pretext to disclaim the truth of the sign sent by Allah. It was precisely at this point that the Divine Power intervened and divested the fire of its capacity to burn: ‘But We said, “Fire, be cool and safe for Ibrahim (Abraham)”’ (*al-Anbiya*: 69).

This means that the natural laws were not created to function absolutely—without being checked. What happened here did not indicate the unrestricted consistency of the natural laws; quite the reverse, this was an indication of the unrestricted Power of the Creator.

It is as if Allah desires to console His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and raise his spirits by consistently providing him with His Succour and Support; he should not be shaken by the fact that his people have resolved to oppose and persecute him. Allah *Glorified is He* also wants to console the believers and reassure them that they are on the Truth.

As for the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘encompasses all mankind’ (*al-Isra*: 60), encompassing necessitates not only knowledge of them, but also power over them. Accordingly, they cannot remove themselves from Allah’s Knowledge or His Power. It is important to have knowledge and power. Indeed, you might know something is harmful but be unable to deter it. In essence, knowledge alone is not sufficient. To be sure, it must be accompanied by the power to act and implement any course of action. This means that Allah encompassing all mankind indicates that He possesses knowledge of them and He is capable of implementing anything He wants with regards to them.

The word ‘*an-nas*’ (‘all mankind’, lit. ‘people’) is used in many different ways. At times it refers to creation in its entirety; from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* until the establishment of the Final Hour. This is exemplified in the Statement of Allah: ‘Say, “I seek refuge with the Lord and Cherisher of mankind, the King of mankind, the God of mankind, from the harm of the

slinking whisperer (of evil), who whispers into the hearts of mankind (*an-nas*), whether they be jinn or people” (*an-Nas*: 1-6).

At other times, the word ‘*an-nas*’ means some of the creation to the exclusion of others, This is illustrated by the Statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘Do they envy [other] people (*an-nas*) for the bounty Allah has granted them?’ (*an-Nisa*: 54)

In the verse under discussion, the Arabic word ‘*an-nas*’ refers to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It is a response to what the disbelievers of Mecca were saying: ‘And they said, “Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man from either of the two cities?”’ (*az-Zukhruf*: 31) Similarly, Allah *Glorified is He*, says: ‘Those who have been warned by other people (*an-nas*), “A host has gathered against you; so beware of them...”’ (*Al-Imran*: 173). Here, we can see again that the word ‘*an-nas*’ refers to some people to the exclusion of others.

In fact, the scholars took time to study the use of the word ‘*an-nas*’ in the verse: ‘And [O Prophet] when We said to you that your Lord encompasses all mankind (*an-nas*)’ (*al-Isra*: 60) and decided that it really refers to only the disbelievers who had taken a hostile stance in relation to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Nevertheless, there is nothing objectionable about interpreting this statement according to the general meaning which is implied from its literal meaning. If interpreted in this way, the verse refers to how Allah encompasses the believers—the foremost of them being Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*—and also how Allah encompasses the disbelievers—the foremost among them being the notables among the disbelievers of Mecca.

For this reason, the all-encompassing knowledge and control being mentioned here is not a single phenomenon: Allah encompasses each of them in a way that is compatible with their standing with Him. If you want to analyse how Allah *Glorified is He* encompasses the believers, and first and foremost Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* you will find that it refers to an all-encompassing concern and protection. The objective is to ward off harm from them. On the other hand, if you want to observe how Allah *Glorified is He* encompasses the disbelievers, it refers to an all-encompassing

control that restricts them and which they will not be able to circumvent or elude. Each manifestation of Allah's all-encompassing knowledge and control has an appropriate manner in which it is implemented.

The manner Allah *Glorified is He* encompasses the disbelievers is expressed in Allah's statement: 'When you are sailing on ships and rejoicing in the favouring wind, a storm arrives: waves come at those on board from all sides and they feel there is no escape' (*Yunus*: 22). The connotation here is that they are being closed in, constrained and left unable to find anything to relieve them.

As for the manner Allah encompasses the believers, the foremost among them being Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself, it is typified by Allah's Statement: 'Our word has already been given to Our slaves, the Messengers. It is they who will be helped' (*as-Saffat*: 171-172). Thus, the Lord encompasses the believers and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; but this is an all-encompassing care. It is as though He is saying, 'Hasten to your task and carry out your responsibilities. Those plans they have concocted will never harm you'. This explains why, when the believers were experiencing the greatest form of persecution and oppression at the hands of the disbelievers—a time in which the believers were not able to do anything, even defend themselves—the statement of Allah was revealed: 'The hosts will be routed and they will turn and flee' (*al-Qamar*: 45).

'Umar Allah be pleased with him—whose opinions were often later supported by the Quran—remarked, 'What hosts are these?' He was truly amazed, 'How can we rout this group of hosts when we can barely defend ourselves⁽¹⁾?' This was a relief for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and a reassurance for the believers. It is as though the verse reads, 'O Muhammad! No matter how much persecution and oppression you experience, Allah will be your aid and support against them'.

(1) 'Ikrima Allah be pleased with him said, 'When the verse: "The hosts will be routed and they will turn and flee" (*al-Qamar*: 45), 'Umar Allah be pleased with him remarked, 'What group of hosts are these? What group of hosts will be routed?' Recollecting, 'Umar Allah be pleased with him said, 'On the day of Badr I saw Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* putting on his armour. He was reciting Quran: "The hosts will be routed and they will turn and flee". That day I understood its meaning'. This was cited by Ibn Kathir in his *Tafsir* (4/266). Later, its authenticity was attested to by Ibn Abu Hatim.

This is also the meaning of what Allah says in another verse: ‘And the ones who support Our Cause will be the winners’ (*as-Saffat*: 173). ‘O Muhammad! You should call all of this to mind when you are forced to deal with adversity and tribulation. Your adversaries think that they have surrounded you and that they have power over you. Always bear in mind that Allah encompasses all people; you are in Allah’s Favour. No external threat will harm you. At this very moment—although unbeknown to them—they are under a siege that they will never be able to escape’.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘We made the vision (*ru'ya*). We showed you nothing but a test for the people’ (*al-Isra'*: 60). The word *ru'ya* (vision) is the verbal noun of the verb ‘*ra'a*’ (to see). The word ‘*ru'yah*’ is also a verbal noun for the verb ‘*ra'a*’. If you intend to refer to a vision that is witnessed during sleep, you say, ‘I witnessed a *ru'ya* (vision)’. On the other hand, if you intend to refer to a vision that is witnessed with the physical eye, you say, ‘I saw a *ru'yah* (“sight” or “scene”)’. The former is exemplified by a statement Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* made in reference to a dream that he witnessed: ‘...he said, “Father, this is the fulfilment of that dream (*ru'ya*) I had long ago. My Lord has made it come true...”’ (*Yusuf*: 100). Notice that in this verse he did not say ‘*ru'yati*’ which implies that it was a sight witnessed with the physical eye. To sum up, the verb is the same, but the verbal nouns used in the varying context differ. As such, the scholars disagree about this ‘*ru'ya*’ that Allah *Glorified is He* has made a trial for men and women.

The majority of the scholars⁽¹⁾ are of the opinion that the mention here refers to the vision that was established at the beginning of the chapter of *al-Isra'*: ‘Glory to Him who made His servant travel by night from the sacred place of worship to the remote mosque...’ (*al-Isra'*: 1). This is, of course, a reference to the Night Journey and the Ascension.

(1) *This was the opinion of Ibn 'Abbas, Abu Malik, Um Hani, Hasan Al-Basri, and Qatada as narrated by As-Suyati; who collected the narrations of their opinion on the matter in Ad-Durr Al-Manthar (5/308-309). Additionally, in his Tafsir (3/49), Ibn Kathir has transmitted the opinion that was favoured by Ibn Jarir about this matter. He said, ‘On the strength of the consensus that exists among the people recognized as authorities in the field of Quranic exegesis concerning this issue (the abovementioned conclusion must be regarded as being conclusive)’. That is to say: In relation to the vision and the tree.*

Other scholars⁽¹⁾ view that the *ru'ya* (vision) being mentioned here is a reference to Allah's statement: 'Allah has truly fulfilled His Messenger Muhammad's vision, "Allah willing, you will most certainly enter the Sacred Mosque in safety, heads shaved, hair cut short and without fear! For Allah knew what you did not, and He has granted you a speedy victory"' (*al-Fath*: 27).

This is the occasion on which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was promised—as was conveyed to him in the verse—that they will enter the Inviolable Mosque that year. However, they were prevented from entry at Hudaibiyya. Consequently, a trial of faith ensued among the Muslim community. They were absolutely downhearted; how could Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* make them a promise which failed to come to fruition?

Afterwards, Allah clarified the wisdom of their failure to enter Mecca that year. As he was on his way back to Medina, Allah *Glorified is He* revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'They were the ones who disbelieved and barred you from the Sacred Mosque and prevented the offering from reaching its place of sacrifice. If there had not been, unknown to you, among them believing men and women whom you will have trampled underfoot, inadvertently incurring guilt on their account—Allah brings whoever He wills into His Mercy. If the [believers] had been clearly separated [from the disbelievers], We will surely have punished those who disbelieved from among them with a painful punishment' (*al-Fath*: 25).

Thus, the Lord prevented them from realizing this vision at the time of Hudaibiyya, for if they had entered Mecca making war and bearing weapons at a time in which there were believing men and women—who were unknown to

(1) In a separate narration attributed to him concerning the vision, Ibn 'Abbas said, 'The vision being referred to in this verse is the vision Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* witnessed in which he entered Mecca during the year of Hudaibiyya. Eventually, they were turned away (at Mecca) and that created a severe trial for the Muslim faithful. At this point, the verse was revealed. Once they were able to enter Mecca the following year, Allah revealed: "Indeed, Allah has shown the truth in His Messenger's [Muhammad] true vision..." (*al-Fath*: 27)'. In his *Tafsir* (5/4011), *Al-Qurtubi* mentioned that this interpretation is weak. 'Indeed, the chapter was revealed during the Meccan phase (of Prophet Muhammad's mission) and the vision (they are attempting to correlate with it) occurred in the Medinese phase', he commented.

them—present, they will have caused those men and women harm and will have attacked them during the conflict. To be sure, at that time there was no way of differentiating between a believer and a disbeliever. They could have killed a believer and been forced to live with the resultant shame. If it was possible to distinguish the believer from the disbeliever, they will have entered Mecca regardless of the wishes of its inhabitants.

In the light of what happened, it was natural that people will begin to harbour some doubts concerning what happened at Hudaibiyya. In fact, the trial could be described as a great tremor for the Muslim community. This tremor was felt so deeply that Al-Faruq ('Umar ibn Al-Khattab) *Allah be pleased with him* said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Are we not upon the Truth? Are they not the partisans of falsehood? Are you not the Messenger of Allah?' Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* responded, 'Adhere to him [Prophet Muhammad] as, by Allah, he is the Messenger of Allah⁽¹⁾'.

Um Salamah, the Mother of the Believers *Allah be pleased with her* played a critical role in solving the utter confusion that had ensued in the wake of that fateful event. When the people refused to comply with the orders of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* —they did not leave Hudaibiyya— Prophet Muhammad entered her tent and commented, 'O Um Salamah, the Muslims have been destroyed. I gave them an order and they did not comply'. Um Salamah counselled him wisely, 'O Prophet Muhammad, they have been hurt. Indeed they have come out of deep devotion to the Sacred House and have been prevented from entering its precincts after having come so close to it. No doubt, this has left them deeply wounded. Do what you have been commanded by Allah, O Prophet Muhammad! Once they see your steadfastness and determination they will comply with your orders'. The suggestion of Um Salamah *Allah be pleased with her* helped to resolve this issue.⁽²⁾

(1) Narrated by Ahmad in his *Musnad* (4/325); it is from a long Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Al-Masar ibn Makhrama and Marwan ibn Al-Hakam that pertains to the occasion of Hudaibiyya.

(2) Narrated by Ahmad in his *Musnad* (4/325) in a very long and detailed Hadith that deals with the occasion of Hudaibiyya on the authority of Al-Masar ibn Makhrama and Marwan ibn Al-Hakam. In the Hadith we find, 'Indeed, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, "O people, offer your sacrificial animals and shave your heads." However,=

Some said, 'The vision that Allah *Glorified is He* has made a trial for the believers is that which was shown to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* before the Campaign of Badr'. This was the occasion on which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'By Allah, it is as though I can see the places where the various persons from the disbelievers will meet their demises'. Prophet Muhammad then pointed to different areas, saying, 'This is where so-and-so will meet his demise and this is where so-and-so will meet his demise; and as for so-and-so, he will meet his demise here'.⁽¹⁾ Actually, the deaths of the people mentioned by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* happened just as he said they will happen. So, tell me—by Allah—who is able to predict what will happen in battle with that degree of precision. Battles are always defined by constant shifts of attacking, retreating, and formational changes of direction. All of this happened, but Prophet Muhammad was still able to pinpoint where these people will meet their deaths. This is because he is truly the Messenger of Allah *Glorified is He*!

Nevertheless, the knowledgeable and well-qualified scholars, who are held in respect by the other every-day scholars⁽²⁾, have said, 'To be sure, these occurrences; whether referring to what happened in *Hudaybiyya* or what took place in relation to Prophet Muhammad's vision at Badr,⁽³⁾ all happened

= not one of them stood up to follow his orders. He repeated this command a second time, and again not one man among them stood up. This prompted him to repeat his command a third time, but again no one from among them stood up to comply with his orders. At this, Prophet Muhammad left and entered the tent of Um Salama Allah be pleased with him. Prophet Muhammad said, "Um Salama, what is the matter with these people?" She replied, "O Messenger of Allah, as you can see they have been deeply wounded. Do not talk to any of them; simply go to the place of offering and slaughter your sacrifice, and then shave your head. If you do this, they will copy you." As a result, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* departed from her tent without speaking to anybody until he reached the place of animal sacrifice where he slaughtered and shaved his head; afterwards, the people stood up and sacrificed their animals and shaved their heads as well. When they were on the way back to Medina from Mecca, about half-way through the route, the chapter of *Al-Fath* was revealed'.

- (1) Narrated by Muslim in his *Sahih* (1779) and by Ahmad in his *Musnad* (3/219) from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Anas Allah be pleased with him.
- (2) Among these scholars one finds the likes of *Al-Qurtubi* who mentioned this view in his *Tafsir* (5/4011) and *Ibn Kathir* in his *Tafsir* (3/49).
- (3) The action taken by Prophet Muhammad on the Day of Badr has not been mentioned in connection with the interpretation of this verse. However, some books do mention this=

during the Medinan phase of Prophet Muhammad's Mission. Yet, the verse under consideration was revealed during the Meccan phase of the mission. In the light of this, we must view the last two positions as being incorrect and view the first as more likely: The vision—mentioned in the verse under discussion—refers to the Night Journey and the Ascension. This is the sounder opinion'.

This will naturally make one enquire, 'Was the Night Journey and the Ascension a dream?' Without doubt, it was a scene that was witnessed with the eyes. But why is the scene that was observed with the physical eye now referred to as a vision that was witnessed while sleeping? How could the Lord give the disbelievers and those of wavering faith an opportunity to say, 'Indeed, the Night Journey and Ascension were visions witnessed in a dream?' In reply, we pose the question, 'Who told you that the word *'ru'ya'* is used to exclusively refer to dreams? If the truth be told, within the language of the Arabs it is used to refer to the vision witnessed during sleep as well as a sight witnessed with the physical eye. This is evidenced by a poem of one of their most outstanding poets, who, upon capturing some valuable game, expressed his feelings in the following in words:

He praised Allah for the vision (al-ru'ya) he saw and, in his heart, joy was felt

And he reassured his soul that earlier he had blamed, charging with guilt

That is to say: He said, '*Allah Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest)' when he saw a valuable game animal approaching him. It is noteworthy that he expressed the occasion of seeing something with the physical eye by using the word *'ru'ya'*.

= *separate opinion which has been refuted and deemed quite weak by the scholars in the field. On the authority of Sahl ibn S'ad, who said, 'This vision refers to the occasion on which Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him saw Bana Umayya jumping vigorously at his pulpit. Prophet Muhammad became very upset, and he did not laugh again until he died'. Al-Qurtubi mentioned this in his Tafsir (5/4011) and also commented on its weakness. Ibn Kathir deemed the veracity of this Hadith to be weak in his Tafsir (3/49). He said, 'Mohammad ibn Al-Hasn ibn Zibala is a transmitter who is discarded due to unreliability, and if all things are taken into consideration, his instructor must also be deemed unreliable'.*

However, the Lord chose to employ the use of the word '*ru'ya*' in order to convey the meaning that this was something wondrous and exceptional. For instance, this is no different from when we say, 'That will only happen in dreams'. Stylistically, this is an example of how the Quran uses the exact and most appropriate forms of the words. The author of the speech before you is the Lord; He deliberately chose the word '*ru'ya*' because it implies that it was a miraculous sign: the Night Journey of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from Mecca to Al-Quds (Jerusalem) in the span of one night. The miraculous aspect of this occasion is not travelling to Al-Quds. To be sure, many of the disbelieving Meccans had already undertaken business and other types of trips to Al-Quds beforehand. The miraculous aspect of this occasion is the amount of time in which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* completed the journey; he went and returned in the span of one night. This is proven by the fact that they challenged Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* jeering, 'Describe Al-Quds (Jerusalem) for us!'⁽¹⁾

If they were in doubt that something like that could ever occur, they will not have asked this question. Therefore, their objection concerned the time it took to complete this journey. A journey—we must keep in mind—that they were accustomed to complete in one month, even when travelling upon their sturdiest camels. Then, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to them, informing them that he had completed the journey in one night. Basically, because the Night Journey is something that took place during a limited amount of time, it is appropriate to call it a '*ru'ya*'. Indeed, dreams are not

(1) *This is what actually occurred; in fact, one of them said, 'O Muhammad, no one knows Al-Quds (Jerusalem) better than I do. Therefore tell me, how are its buildings arranged, what is the general lay-out of the city, and how close is it to the mountains?' The narrator said, 'Al-Quds was raised before Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him while he was in his seat and was looking upon it like one of us look at his home'. The narrator continued, 'He [Prophet Muhammad] said the buildings are arranged in such-and-such a manner, the general lay out of the city is like this and that, and its closeness to the mountains is approximately such-and-such'. Someone else from among them said, 'You have spoken the truth'. Afterwards, he went to the other disbelievers and said, 'Muhammad has spoken the truth in what he has narrated'. Ibn Kathir mentioned this in his Tafsir (3/13).*

subject to the constraints of time. Accordingly, things that will normally require large amounts of time can be completed within dreams in a span of hours.

What is more is that through the use of recent technology, scholars who study the issue of human consciousness during sleep have been able to conclude that the activity of the human mind while sleeping does not exceed seven seconds. This figure is being taken out of the total amount of hours that sleep normally lasts.

Yet, if you wanted to narrate what you witnessed during your sleep it takes a considerable amount of time. Where is 'time' within a dream? It does not exist. Indeed, the vehicles of perception that the human being uses to acquire a sense of time are not at work during sleep. Thus, the one who is asleep does not sense time, and when a dream starts, it flashes quickly before him because it, alone, occupies the mind. This explains why someone who walks hurriedly does not sense the passing of time. Just as we say in Egypt, 'So-and-so can understand the affair while it is flying by'. This is an indication of an action being completed rapidly because all of his energies and faculties are focused on the completion of just that one thing.

Another point can be considered: if the Night Journey and the Ascension were dreams, will this create a trial of faith for the people? Imagine if someone said to us, 'Last night, in my sleep, I travelled from Cairo to New York and from there to Hawaii, and finally from Hawaii to Japan'. Will we say that he was a liar?

Basically, Allah's statement that says this '*ru'ya*' (vision) was something that tested the people and tried them, implies that the context of this vision is not one that occurred in a dream, but one that was experienced with the physical eye. It is as though Allah selected this word in order to make the response of the disbelievers a proof of Prophet Muhammad's truthfulness. They said, 'Even travelling upon our best camels, that journey takes a month to complete; and here you are claiming to have completed the same trip in a single night!' If this occurrence had been a dream, they will not have responded in this fashion. But what is the wisdom that underlies testing people and trying them with something like this? The wisdom was to test the people in order to melt what was in their hearts in the crucible of faith. This

purification process was done for the good to be separated from the bad; and the believer from the disbeliever. Within our ranks, none besides those whose commitment to the faith was true and whose belief was strong remain. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* does not want to entrust His Way—the Way that will lead to the progress and development of life until the establishment of the Final Hour—to anyone besides people whose commitment to the faith is reliable. This is what qualifies them to carry the Divine Message.

The Night Journey represents the crucible that made the genuineness of Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* shine. He, when the disbelievers approached him saying, ‘Indeed your companion is now telling us that he travelled to Al-Quds (Jerusalem), was raised up through the heavens and returned to Mecca, all in one night’, confidently proclaimed, ‘If he said it, it is true’.⁽¹⁾ This was his response; he answered in the most direct manner possible. The only criteria he used for judging the truth or falsity of the claim was assessing whether Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had said it or not. This describes how the dross was cast aside by the incident of the Night Journey and the Ascension. The dross is removed by calamities and tribulations that shake it and cause it to become unsettled; the person that represents dross, within this analogy, is tested and his dishonesty becomes clear by denying and disbelieving.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...as was the cursed tree [mentioned] in the Quran...’ (*al-Isra*: 60). This means that the cursed tree that has been mentioned in the Quran has also been a means of testing people, although the test of (accepting the validity of) the Night Journey lies in accepting the unusual speed in which it took place. As for the cursed tree, the test of accepting its validity lies in accepting the fact that it grows from the bottom of the Hellfire.

It is well known that trees are plants that cannot survive without water and irrigation. Therefore, how can there be a tree in Hell? This tree represented a

(1) *Al-Qurtubi mentioned this in his Tafsir (5/4012). The complete version contains the following: they said to him, ‘Do you believe in what he said before hearing it from him yourself?’ He responded, ‘Where are your minds? I believe him in what he conveys of the Message from Heaven; how could I then disbelieve him in what he conveys concerning Al-Quds? The heavens are much further away than Al-Quds’.*

test for the faith of people. Thus, when Abu Jahl heard this verse, he attempted to make it a bone of contention; he said to the people⁽¹⁾, 'The Quran which Muhammad recites states that there is a tree in Hell called '*Shajarat Az-zaqqum*'. How can this saying be sensible when fire consumes everything, even stones?' Logically, this objection seems credible. However, a believer does not tackle Allah's verses in terms of logic, as he should take into consideration Allah's Omnipotence. Actually, things do not derive their functions and properties from the elements from which they are formed, but they derive them from the laws that have been established by the One Who has created them. The Creator *the Glorified and Exalted* commands the tree to grow from the bottom of Hell due to His Absolute Power. He also commanded fire to be cool and safe for Ibrahim (Abraham).

When Ibn Az-Zab'ari heard Allah's saying: 'Is Paradise a better accommodation or the tree of *Zaqqum*. Indeed, We have made it a torment for the wrongdoers. It is a tree that emerges from the bottom of the Hellfire.' (*as-Saffat*: 62-64) he commented, 'By Allah, the only '*Zaqqum*' we know is the combination of butter and dates, so have some with me.'⁽²⁾ He ridicules Allah's saying and belies Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him*.

On the other hand, the believers are urged by their faith and the truthfulness of the Messenger, who conveyed Allah's sayings, to accept and believe in

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- (1) *It was narrated on the authority of Qatada that he said, 'When Allah mentioned the tree of Zaqqum, the wrongdoers were tried; Abu Jahl said, 'Your companion says that there is a tree in fire although it is well-known that fire consumes trees. The only Zaqqum we know is the combination of dates and butter, so have some 'Zaqqum' with me. Then, when people wondered that there is a tree growing in Hell, Allah sent down the following verse: 'It is a tree issuing from the bottom of the Hellfire.' (as-Saffat: 64) This verse means that the tree is actually nourished by fire because it is created from fire. 'Its emerging fruit as if it was heads of the devils.' (as-Saffat: 65) Its fruits are likened to the heads of devils.*
- (2) *Al-Wahidi quoted in his book 'Asbab An-Nuzul' (p.166) that Ibn 'Abbas said, 'When Allah Glorified is He mentioned Az-Zaqqum (the tree of Hell), the members of Quraysh were frightened. Abu Jahl said, "Do you know the Zaqqum that Muhammad scares you with?" They said, "No." He said, "It is porridge mixed with butter. If possible, by Allah we would take of it as much as possible.' Then Allah Glorified is He revealed: '...as was the cursed tree [mentioned] in the Quran...' (al-Isra': 60) As-Suyuti stated in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (5/310) attributed this narrated to Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Abu Hatim, Ibn Mardawih and Al-Bayhaqi in Al-Ba'th.*

Allah's sayings. They know that things do not take their only from the elements from which they are created. On the contrary, these attributes are given in by the Will of their Creator. Allah's Absolute Power arranges things and gives them their attributes.

A person may ask: Why does Allah describe this tree as cursed? Why is it cursed although it is one of Allah's miracles and a sign of His Omnipotence? It also indicates that natural laws do not govern the universe, but Allah controls the universe and has the ultimate ability to change the nature of objects. How can it be cursed while it contains the disbeliever's food by which he will be tormented? It is a means of punishment and torment for the enemies of Allah. The intended meaning here is that it is the tree whose eater is cursed, as only the sinners will eat from this tree, as Allah says: 'The tree of *zaqqum* will be the food of the sinner' (*ad-Dukhan*: 43-44). The sinner is undoubtedly cursed. Nevertheless, why does the verse state that the curse is cast on the tree and not the one who eats from it?

It was said that the Arabs understand that anything that involves harm is cursed and distant from Allah's Mercy. When the disbeliever sees this tree, he will curse it, so it is cursed by the one who is forced to eat from its fruits. In addition, the disbeliever will eat from it because he is cursed. Accordingly, it can be said that the tree and the people who will eat from it are cursed.⁽¹⁾

Among the problematic issues that are raised concerning this verse in the modern era are the statements of the orientalist who want to find fault in the Quran and raise objections concerning its styles, such as Allah's saying about *Az-Zaqqum* tree (tree of hell): 'Its emerging fruit as if it was heads of the devils.' (*as-Saffat*: 65) The reason for their objection is that simile and metaphor are normally employed to express something which is unknown to the speaker by comparing it with something known. In this verse, the thing being likened (tree of *Az-Zaqqum*) is unknown to us, as it is considered unseen, about which we do not know anything. In addition, the thing that is likened to is also unknown to us (heads of devils). How an unknown object is

(1) This was mentioned by Yahya Zakariyya Al-Ansari in his book entitled, 'Fath Ar-Rahman Bikashf ma Yaltabih fil Quran' p. 238, edition 1985, Al-Sabuny Publishing House.

likened to something unknown too? In fact, we have never seen the tree of *Az-Zaqqum* (tree of hell) and do not know its fruits, nor have we ever seen the devil in order to know how its head looks like.

The orientalist say that the only reason that the Muslims do not criticise this verse is that they give the Quran a holy and sublime status, so this prevents them from criticising the Quran. If they start thinking of the styles used in the Quran, they will come up with new facts. We refute that opinion, saying that they have learned the Arabic language as a foreign language, so they are not proficient enough in the language to understand the literary style of the Book of Allah. There is great difference between being talented and proficient in the language and learning a language as a foreign language in order to earn one's living.

Talent for language means interaction between the language and one's emotions. Therefore, the person who has this talent understands the intended meaning of a certain expression immediately. As for language learnt as a foreign language -especially at an old age - it merely enables a person to speak proficiently. If they had this talent for Arabic, they would not have even raised this objection. Before the revelation of the Quran, a Bedouin said⁽¹⁾:

He was producing a loud noise like a camel that was strangled with a rope,
 He wants to kill me but the man is not murderous,
 Can he kill me and a mashrafi⁽²⁾ sword is always beside me,
 It is sharpened like the canines of a ghoul.

Have you ever seen a ghoul? Does it even exist? Nevertheless, the Arab poet likened his sharpened sword to the canines of a ghoul because people imagine a ghoul as having a frightening form. Due to the prevalence of the horrible image of a ghoul, this image makes it permissible to liken things to it.

The same case applies to the image of the devil; although no one has actually seen it, people imagine it a hideous, repulsive, and scary appearance.

(1) The poet is Imru' Al-Qays ibn Hajar, a well-known poet from the pre-Islamic era.

(2) A Mashrafi sword: The sword is attributed to a town in Yemen named Al-Masharif.
 [Lisan Al-'Arab under the (sharaf) entry]

If we assigned to all cartoonists and artists the task of drawing a picture of a devil, all of them will draw pictures that differ from each other, but undoubtedly each of them will have his own ugly and repulsive image of the devil.

If Allah *Glorified is He* likened the fruits of *Az-Zaqqum* tree (tree of Hell) to something known, people would have the same mental image for it. Nonetheless, Allah willed for people to have different horrible images for *Az-Zaqqum* tree (tree of Hell). Accordingly, this particular simile benefits the verse more effectively than any other expression. This ambiguity reveals the intended meaning.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...We warn them, but this only increases their insolence.' (*al-Isra'*: 60) This means that Allah warns them that they will subject themselves to the punishment from which those who belied the Messengers suffered. Eventually, the Messengers gained advocacy and the disbelievers were forsaken. When you warn someone of an impending evil, you have done him a real favour. For example, when a father warns his son of negligence and laziness and reminds him that their consequence is potential failure and being scorned by people, he advises him to study his lessons hard.

Accordingly, Allah's saying: '...We warn them...' (*al-Isra'*: 60) is considered a bounty from Allah because Allah gives them a horrible image of the consequences so that they do not commit the acts that entail this punishment. We mentioned previously that warnings can be a bounty, as mentioned in Allah's saying in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*: 'A flame of fire and smoke will be sent to you, and you will not defend yourselves. So which of the favours of your Lord would you deny?' (*ar-Rahman*: 35-36) Mentioning fire and flames in this verse is considered a bounty because it informs people about something that will take place in the future, as a result of the actions that they should be warned against doing. Allah's saying: '...We warn them, but this only increases their insolence' (*al-Isra'*: 60) indicates that warning against punishment would increase them in oppression because they understood properly the requirements of faith. If they were unaware of these requirements, they would testify that there is no deity but Allah, and would become believers. However, they understood very well that this testimony of faith means that sovereignty lies in the Hands of Allah, and that Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, is the one that conveys Allah's Law. Therefore, they feared the potential

negative consequences of embracing Islam, as they feared for their sovereignty and status in the Arabian Peninsula. They rejected the fact that Islam regards the masters equal to slaves.

The verse means that whenever they were reminded of Allah and warned of punishment, they increased in arrogance and aversion to Allah's religion, which destroyed the transient dominance they enjoyed. Therefore, the Messengers' enemies enjoyed transient dominance, but the Messengers destroyed their dominance and treated all people on equal footing.

This fact is manifested in Islam when Messenger Muhammad arrived in Medina, and its inhabitants were preparing to enthrone 'Abdullah ibn Ubay as their king,⁽¹⁾ but people dispersed and left him and gathered around Messenger Muhammad. Therefore, it is normal that Ibn Ubay felt angry, increasingly resented and antagonised Messenger Muhammad and envied him the love and support he received from people.

Then Allah has revealed that this is the attitude of stubborn people who oppose the Truth and scheme against goodness. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ
 قَالَ أَأَسْجُدُ لِمَنْ خَلَقْتَ طِينًا

**When We said to the angels, 'Bow down before Adam,' they
 all bowed down, but not Iblis. He retorted, 'Why should I
 bow down to someone You have created out of clay?' [61]
 (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 61)**

This means that envy is as old as the creation of man on earth. We should remember what occurred between Adam and Satan, who is cursed by Allah.

(1) *Al-Bayhaqi stated in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa (2/499) that when the Messenger Muhammad entered Medina, he passed by 'Abdullah ibn Ubay ibn Salul at the end of a path where the latter's home was located. Prophet Muhammad waited for 'Abdullah - who was the master of Al-Khazraj - to invite him into the house. Instead, 'Abdullah said to him, 'Go to those who invited you and they will host you.' When Messenger Muhammad mentioned to a group of Al-Ansar (Medinan supporters) what happened with 'Abdullah ibn Ubay, Sa'ad ibn 'Ubadah said, 'O Messenger of Allah, before Allah blessed us with your coming, we wanted to crown 'Abdullah ibn Ubay as our king.'*

Envy has started at the beginning of creation and will continue until the Day of Judgment.

Allah reminds Muhammad and his people of the time when He told the angels to prostrate before Adam. We tackled previously prostration which should only be dedicated to Allah *Glorified is He*. Nonetheless, if the order to prostrate before other than Allah comes from Allah, nobody should object to this order. Allah knows that the angels' prostration before Adam is not shame nor does it undermine their faith or worship of Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* because obedience is the essence of worship.

Allah says about the angels who are responsible for arranging and organizing affairs on earth: 'For each one are successive [angels] before and behind him who protect him by the decree of Allah...' (*ar-Ra'd*: 11) Allah commanded them to prostrate before Adam because he was about to be Father of humanity. Allah was about to subject the entire creation for Adam, even the angels were about to be placed at his service. Therefore, Allah ordered them to prostrate before Adam out of obedience and submission to His command, not out of submission to Adam.

Allah says: '...but not Iblis...' (*al-Isra'*: 61). Some people have concluded that Iblis (Satan) was an angel. We excuse the proponents of this opinion if we tackle this verse without considering the other verses that address this topic. However, if we discuss a general topic like this one, we must consider all the relevant verses so that we can make an accurate picture. The evidence of those who support this opinion is that Allah says: '...they all prostrated, but not Iblis...' (*al-Isra'*: 62). The command was issued to the angels, which means he is one of them as they believe. Nonetheless, as Allah *Glorified is He* follows: '...and they prostrated, except for Iblis. He was of the jinn and departed from the command of his Lord...' (*al-Kahf*: 50) If their evidence is based on the command Allah gives to the angels, we have strong evidence that states that Iblis was of the jinn. Nevertheless, a question may rise: If Iblis was of the jinn, why is he held to account because he did not prostrate?

There is a clear text in the Quran that establishes that Iblis was of the jinn. However, Allah *Glorified is He* held him to account because he did not prostrate to Adam and considered him one of the angels because he obeyed

Allah out of free will whereas the angels obey Allah innately. In this way, the rank of Iblis is more elevated than that of the angels because he has the choice to obey or disobey Allah. He chose to obey Allah although he was able to show disobedience, so he assumed the rank of the angels. Rather, he was actually the master of the angels⁽¹⁾ who boasted that he was chosen to be righteous though he had the ability to disobey Allah. Furthermore, he abided by Allah's instructions.

He had reached the rank and company of the angels. If an order is issued to those of a lower rank, it is expected that those of the higher rank should obey this order. If we consider him as occupying a lower rank than the angels occupy, the order to prostrate which was given to the angels applies to the one of the lower rank. Therefore, he had to prostrate in all cases.

For example - and to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection - if the President enters upon the ministers, they stand out of respect and reverence. If the deputy ministers are also present, they will also stand in order to honour him.

Among the problematic issues relevant to this topic, which have been raised by the orientalist, is the wording of the Quran about Iblis, as it uses 'refused' (*al-Kahf*: 31) 'was arrogant' (*Sad*: 74) 'refused and was arrogant' (*al-Baqara*: 34) 'what prevented you from prostrating to...' (*Sad*: 75) and '...what has kept you from prostrating...' (*al-A'raf*: 12).

We discussed the inability of these people to understand the Arabic styles and expressions because they do not have talent for Arabic. The one who reflects on the expressions used in the Quran will find that they are in harmony with one another.

The word '*aba*' which is used in the Arabic text of the verse, implies only refusal, but it does not imply arrogance. However, Allah wants to convey that Iblis refused to prostrate out of arrogance. Thus, the use of different styles in this regard conveys this meaning.

(1) *Sa'id ibn Al-Musayyib said, 'He was the leader of the angels that belonged to the lowest heaven.' Ibn 'Abbas mentioned, 'Iblis (Satan) was in the company of the noblest and most honourable angels. He was a treasurer of the Garden and he was in charge of the lowest heaven.' Ibn Kathir mentioned this in his Tafsir (3/89)*

Allah's saying: '...what prevented you from prostrating to...' (*Sad*: 75) and '...what has kept you from prostrating...' (*al-A'raf*: 12). The first wording of the Arabic text of the verse is in the affirmative case, while the second is in the negative case. At the first glance, this appears to be a contradiction between the two verses, as some scholars said that the Arabic negative particle 'la' in the second verse as being is not essential. The whole line of argument that maintains that the Quran contains a non-essential word is highly inappropriate. The One Who revealed this Quran is far from using non-essential words. Other people who show some politeness when speaking about the Quran say that the negative particle (*la*) here serves the purpose of connecting the clause, as they find it inappropriate to say that the Quran contains non-essential words. In reality, the negative particle here neither serves the purpose of connecting the clause nor is superfluous. Actually, it adds a new meaning.

Allah's saying: '...what prevented you from prostrating to...' (*Sad*: 75) implies that Iblis was about to prostrate, but something prevented him from doing so. The phrase 'what prevented you from so-and-so' is said when a person is about to do an action but stops.

On the other hand, the verse: '...what has kept you from prostrating...' (*al-A'raf*: 12) means that something convinced Iblis (Satan) to abstain from prostrating. Therefore, the two verses are different in meaning, and both of them are necessary.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...Why should I bow down to someone You have created out of clay?' (*al-Isra'*: 61) The question here implies objection and refusal. This verse is clarified by other verses, such as Allah's saying: '...He said, "I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay."' (*al-A'raf*: 12) It is implied from the previous verse that Iblis agrees that Allah is the One Who created the whole of him and Adam. He only considers the elements from which each of them was created: Adam was created from clay and Iblis was created from fire. However, why does he consider fire better than clay? Both of these elements were created by Allah and play an important role in life. Could we - for example - say that the eye is better than the ear? This is not possible because each of them has a role that the other cannot do.

We mentioned previously that you sometimes prefer a straight piece of iron or a piece of iron with a hook. In case you need a piece of iron with a hook, warped iron will be more preferable than straight iron. Everything in the universe has been created to fulfil a certain purpose, and will not be good except when it performs its role. Therefore, how did Iblis come up with this idea that fire is superior to soil? The original fuel of fire is wood, which it uses to burn, and wood grows out of clay. Clay was created before fire and is superior to it. Therefore, Iblis's judgement of this situation was mistaken.

Allah's saying: 'You have created out of clay?' (*an-Nahl*: 61) means that Allah created him from clay. In actuality, creation from clay only represents one stage among the various stages of the creation process.

Allah's saying: 'When I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My [created] soul...' (*al-Hijr*: 29) implies that there are many stages of the creation, which contained creation from water, dust and clay. When water is mixed with dust, it forms clay which blackens by the passage of time and its scent changes and becomes dried mud. This dried mud is remarkably similar to the way the people of the rural areas make bricks. During this process, they mix dust with water and straw, and leave the mixture for a period of time until the odour changes. Then, they pour the final product into the mould. When clay is left to dry and harden, it will become argil such as pottery. In this stage, when you knock on it, it makes a remarkable sound.

After all these stages, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'When I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My [created] soul, then fall down to him in prostration.' (*al-Hijr*: 29) Therefore, there is no ground for raising an objection to the fact that on different occasions the Quran has mentioned the creation of the human being as coming out of various elements: water, dust, clay, and dried mud. All of these elements represent different stages of the creation of one creature.

Then, Allah says:

قَالَ أَرَأَيْتَكَ هَذَا الَّذِي كَرَّمْتَ عَلَيَّ لَئِنْ أَخَّرْتَنِ إِلَى يَوْمِ
الْقِيَمَةِ لَأَحْتَنِكَ ذُرِّيَّتَهُ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿٦٢﴾

**And [then] said, ‘You see this being You have honoured
above me? If You reprove me until the Day of Resurrection,
I will lead all but a few of his descendants by the nose’ [62]
(The Quran, *al-Isra*: 62)**

Iblis (Satan) says: *ara'aytuka* in which the (*hamza*) is used for as an interrogative particle, the letter (*ta*) and (*kaf*) are used to indicate that someone is being addressed. Both of the two letters are used in order to place an emphasis. The word means: ‘You do this’ and also ‘inform me’. In the Quran, seeing something is equal to learning it because knowledge by the eye is certain. Therefore, the most certain knowledge is that which is gained by vision, while knowledge gained by the ears is less certain, as you may hear something which appear to be a lie. This meaning is mentioned in Allah’s saying: ‘Have you not known, [O Muhammad], how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant?’ (*al-Fil*: 1) The verb *tara* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse is used despite the fact that during the Year of the Elephant Messenger Muhammad was an infant. Therefore, the meaning is: ‘Have you not known?’ Allah did not use the word *ta'lam* and used the word *tara* instead. This part of the verse means that Allah tells Messenger Muhammad that when He informs Messenger Muhammad of something, he should regard this knowledge more affirmed than the knowledge gained by his eyes.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...You see this being You have honoured above me?...’ (*al-Isra*: 62) This means that Iblis (Satan) asks Allah about the reason that He preferred Adam to him. It seems that giving preference to Adam over Iblis is something that needs to be justified and substantiated. Iblis waits for an answer from his Lord *Glorified is He*. Iblis’s rancour and envy caused him to say: ‘...If You reprove me until the Day of Resurrection, I will lead all but a few of his descendants by the nose.’ (*al-Isra*: 62) The animosity and jealousy he harboured for Adam happened in advance, and he did not wait for receiving an answer.

The word *akhhkartani* means reprieving me until the Day of Resurrection. This implies that he knows that any living being, either a human being or jinn, has an appointed term. He asked Allah to reprieve him, an act that implies exaggerated obstinacy. He does not threaten them throughout the span of his life, but he wants to do so until the Day of Judgment. This means that he not only threatens Adam, but also his descendants. Iblis directs his hostility towards Adam, so why does he extend this hostility towards Adam's descendants? He should have limited his envy and anger to Adam only, and then advised his (Iblis) offspring to carry on the struggle after his demise. This is the rage that filled his heart and completely consumed him.

In fact, Allah *Glorified is He* reprieved him, saying: '...you are of those reprieved.' (*al-A'raf*: 15) and Satan said, '...I will lead all but a few of his descendants by the nose.' (*al-Isra'*: 62) The Arabic character (*lam*) is used to indicate an oath, as it is used in another verse in which Allah says: '...and I will mislead them all.' (*Sad*: 82) Iblis is bizarre; he swears by Allah while knowing that life span and the appointed time of death are in the Hand of Allah *Glorified is He*; then he asks Him to postpone his appointed time. However, he does not obey Allah's order to prostrate before Adam.

The Arabic word (*iktinak*) has two meanings; the first connotes complete elimination or removal. For example, people say, 'The locusts *iktanak* the plant' which means that they devoured it entirely. The second meaning refers to overwhelming someone to do something. This meaning is derived from the reins that are placed upon a horse's jaw that help steer the horse in different directions and control it by force.

Therefore, *iktinak* can be conceived of as elimination of or compulsory control over something. Allah's saying: '...all but a few...' (*al-Isra'*: 62) indicates Iblis's acquaintance with Allah's Power. He also knows how to swear an oath by Allah, as he said: 'By Your Might, I will surely mislead them all.' (*Sad*: 82) It means: By Might that you exercise over Your creation. Allah says: '...let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so...' (*al-Kahf*: 29) As for the slaves whom Allah has guided, Iblis cannot approach them nor can he exert any influence on them. Iblis remembers Allah's Power and knows that if Allah wills to keep for Himself a slave who

dedicates his worship sincerely to Allah; Iblis will not be able to misguide. He said: 'Except Your true servants.' (*Sad*: 83)

Allah's saying: '...all but a few...' (*al-Isra*': 62) refers to the believers who have been chosen and guided by Allah, so Iblis (Satan) cannot approach them by any means. Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ أَذْهَبْ فَمَنْ تَبِعَكَ مِنْهُمْ فَإِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ جَزَاءُكُمْ جَزَاءً مَوْفُورًا ﴿٦٣﴾

Allah said, 'Go away! Hell will be your reward, and the reward of any of them who follow you – an ample reward [63] (The Quran, *al-Isra*': 63)

Allah's saying: 'go away' indicates that Allah dismisses and banishes him. The second part of the verse reads: '...Hell will be your reward, and the reward of any of them who follow you...' (*al-Isra*': 63). It means that those who follow Iblis will be rewarded by Hell. We notice that the Allah says: 'your reward' and not 'their reward' because Iblis is considered one of them, so he will receive the same reward. He is also the one being addressed in this verse. This prevents him from thinking that the recompense that is mentioned in the verse is limited to the disobedient from among the human beings. It also prevents him from claiming that he is simply fulfilling the decree of Allah expressed in His saying: 'And incite [to senselessness] whoever you can among them with your voice and assault them with your horses and foot soldiers and become a partner in their wealth and their children and promise them. But Satan does not promise them except delusion.' (*al-Isra*': 64) These are not commands that are required to be obeyed, as there is a difference between a command that is required to be obeyed and a command that is not required to be obeyed. An order is given from one in authority to the subordinate, but if the command cannot logically be fulfilled, the intention differs.

For example, when you tell your son to study his lessons and work hard, but he does not show interest, you tell him to play as he wishes. Do you actually mean that you want him to fulfil your command to play? If your son fails testing his exam, will he say that you ordered him to play? This command cannot be taken from the outward appearance, as it is intended as a warning.

Allah's saying: '... an ample reward.' (*al-Isra'*: 63) means that the reward will be full without any shortage with regard to punishment and those being punished.

Allah *Glorified is He* says addressing Iblis:

وَأَسْتَفِزُّ مَنْ أَصْطَعَتْ مِنْهُمْ بِصَوْتِكَ وَأَجْلِبْ عَلَيْهِمْ بِخَيْلِكَ وَرَجِلِكَ وَشَارِكِهِمْ
فِي الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَوْلَادِ وَعَدَّهُمْ وَمَا يَعِدُهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ إِلَّا غُرُورًا ﴿٦٤﴾

**Rouse whichever of them you can with your voice, muster
your cavalry and infantry against them, share their wealth
and their children with them, and make promises to them –
Satan promises them nothing but delusion [64]**

(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 64)

Allah says: 'Rouse whichever of them you can with your voice...' (*an-Nahl*: 64). Sometimes you tell your son who slackens to rise and to be active. Allah also says: 'O you who have believed, what is [the matter] with you that, when you are told to go forth in the cause of Allah, you adhere heavily to the earth? ...' (*at-Tawba*: 38) You may tell the person who slackens to rise and move. Allah tells Iblis to rouse whichever of them he can with his voice, and to deceive them with his devilish insinuations, either from among devils or the devilish human beings who assist and support him. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...muster your cavalry and infantry against them...' (*al-Isra'*: 64) (*aglib* 'alayhim) means mustering and making a loud voice, which is like the voices produced by the commandos during their attack or the karate champions.

These voices are specifically intended to frighten and distract the opponent. Additionally, these screams weaken the opponents' attention, so he cannot react properly. Therefore, overcoming the opponent becomes easier for him. Allah's saying: '...muster your cavalry and infantry...' (*al-Isra'*: 64) means to shout a battle cry while riding horses in order to 'muster' these people. Sometimes, when the Arabs speak of horses, they mean the cavalry. This is similar to the Hadith: 'O cavalry of Allah, Mount.'⁽¹⁾ This evokes an image of

(1) This mentioned by Al-'Ajluni in *Kashf Al-Khafa'* (2/531). He said: 'It was narrated by Abu As-Sheikh in *An-Nasikh wal Mansukh* on the authority of 'Abd Al-Karim who said: =

the knight's cavalry. The word (*rajalik*), which is mentioned in the Arabic version of the verse, is derived from *rajilan* (coming on foot); this word implies continuation of abiding by a certain routine, and also refers to infantrymen.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...share their wealth...' (*al-Isra'*: 64). How can he share their wealth? He made the illegal wealth attractive to them by earning their money through illicit means and spending it on prohibited matters. It is supposed that the children have pure lineage. The task of Iblis is to corrupt lineage, make adultery attractive to people so that they beget illegal children. He may also urge them to raise their children as Jews or Christians, or to kill them out of fear of poverty or the like. These are examples of Iblis's sharing in people's children.

Allah's saying: '...and make promises to them...' (*al-Isra'*, 64) means give them false promises, as Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'Satan threatens you with poverty and orders you to immorality, while Allah promises you forgiveness from Him and bounty. And Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing.' (*al-Isra'*: 64)

Allah says: 'Satan promises them nothing but delusion.' (*al-Isra'*: 64) Iblis can delude only the negligent and heedless people, and make falsehood attractive to those people. You can never delude a person, so that he regards falsehood as the Truth except when this person is heedless and inattentive. If this person uses his mind and becomes attentive, he will distinguish between the Truth and falsehood.

This explains why Allah *Glorified is He* often addresses us, saying: '...Then will you not reason?' (*al-Qasas*: 60) And: '...Then will you not give thought?' (*al-An'am*: 50) Allah also addresses people, saying: 'Then do they not reflect...' (*an-Nisa'*: 82) and '...O you of understanding...' (*at-Talaq*: 10).

= 'Sa'id ibn Jubayr narrated the story of the soldiers to me. He said that some people came to the Messenger Muhammad and said, "We pledge our allegiance to you and the cause of Islam." He continued with the story, mentioning, "The Prophet commanded to call the people, "O cavalry of Allah, Mount up." They took their mounts immediately, and none from among them tarried behind. Sa'id continued. In the Fath (7/413), Ibn Hajar said: "Ibn 'A'idh narrated from Mursil Qatada: "Messenger Muhammad dispatched someone to call the people, 'O cavalry of Allah, Mount up.'"

All these are evidence that proves the importance of the intellect, as Allah encourages us to use it in all of our affairs. Whenever we hear anything, we should think about it. Why does Allah give us this command? Why does Allah consistently urge us to think and reflect on everything? Undoubtedly, the one who urges you to think and reflect on matters is sure that what he offers is good. For example, the honest fabric merchant who sells good fabrics displays his product with confidence, and invites you take a closer look in order to assess its quality. If Allah *Glorified is He* wants to call us to faith without pondering, He will not call us to think and contemplate.

Iblis' falsity promises and deceives you when he is heedless and inattentive. However, if you are attentive to his tricks, he will not approach you. One of the most captivating tricks used by Satan is to make the worldly life attractive to people who are given to heedlessness. He incites them to enjoy their life illegally, and not to pay heed to resurrection, reckoning, or recompense.

These insinuations can only be believed by the person who is inclined toward disobedience. He obeys Iblis and falls prey to his false promise. On the Day of Judgment, Iblis will acquit himself from these imbeciles and say: 'And Satan will say when the matter has been concluded, "Indeed, Allah had promised you the promise of truth. I promised you, but I betrayed you. But I had no authority over you except that I invited you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me; but blame yourselves. I cannot be called to your aid, nor can you be called to my aid. Indeed, I deny your association of me [with Allah] before. Indeed, for the wrongdoers is a painful punishment..."' (*Ibrahim: 22*).

The previous two verses include five orders for Iblis: Go, rouse, muster, share, and make promises. These orders were not issued for Iblis to implement them, but to threaten him and manifest his inability to impede the progress of the call to faith or to prevent people from entering its fold. Allah *Glorified is He* tells Iblis that whatever he does, he will not obstruct the advancement of Allah's religion.

Therefore, Allah says:

إِنَّ عِبَادِي لَيْسَ لَكَ عَلَيْهِمْ سُلْطَانٌ وَكَفَىٰ بِرَبِّكَ وَكِيلًا ﴿٦٥﴾

**But you will have no authority over My [true] servants:
Your Lord can take care of them well enough [65]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 65)**

We have already discussed the difference between the words '*ibad*' and '*abid*' in meaning. The word '*abid*' refers to the slaves who are submissive to the will of the master in matters in which they do not have choice, but rebellious in the matters in which they are given the right to choose. As for the word '*ibad*', it refers to people who are submissive to the will of their Lord in matters in which they do not have a choice, and in matters in which they do have a choice. They accept to be submissive to Allah in all situations.

Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about His slaves and those whom He has elected in His saying: '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. Those who spend [part of] the night to their Lord prostrating and standing [in prayer]. Those who say, "Our Lord, avert from us the punishment of Hell. Indeed, its punishment is ever adhering." (an-Nahl: 63-65) The servants of Allah are His elects and beloved people who prefer to submit to His Will even in matters in which they are allowed to choose. Therefore, they deserve this Divine protection against the plots, insinuations, and tricks of Iblis: 'But you will have no authority over My [true] servants...' (*al-Isra'*: 65). We previously discussed the plot of Iblis, which Allah describes in the following verse: '...the plot of Satan has ever been weak.' (*an-Nisa'*: 76) As a matter of fact, Iblis will say on the Day of Judgment before his victims - those whom he misled and deceived - as a pretext: '...But I had no authority over you except that I invited you, and you responded to me...' (*Ibrahim*: 22). This means that he does not have any authority over people by which he forces them to disobey Allah. In addition, he does not have any definitive proof in order to convince them to disobey Allah.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...Your Lord can take care of them well enough.' (*al-Isra'*: 65)

The word *Al-wakil* means the patron and supporter. This word also entails trusting someone to perform all the tasks one needs. If you can trust some people and entrust your interests to them, what will be the case if your patron is Allah *Glorified is He*? Undoubtedly, if Allah is your patron, He will support and suffice you, so you will not need anyone else.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

رَبُّكُمُ الَّذِي يُرْسِلُ لَكُمْ الْفُلْكَ فِي الْبَحْرِ لِتَبْتَغُوا
مِنْ فَضْلِهِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ بِكُمْ رَحِيمًا ﴿٦٦﴾

[People], it is your Lord who makes ships go smoothly for you on the sea so that you can seek His bounty: He is most merciful towards you [66] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 66)

Allah is responsible for creating and sustaining people. He created you from nothing, and sustains the believer and disbeliever. The word *yuzji* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means sending gradually. The word *al-fulk* means ships; Allah says: 'ships which sail through the sea with that which benefits people' (*al-Baqara*: 164). Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'It is He who enables you to travel on land and sea until, when you are in ships and they sail with them by a good wind' (*Yunus*: 22). Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'so that you can seek His bounty.' (*al-Isra'*: 66) The word *ibtigha'* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means seeking good benefits from the sea, such as food or something else. Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'And it is He who subjected the sea for you to eat from it tender meat and to extract from it ornaments which you wear...' (*an-Nahl*: 14).

The sea is one of the sources of provision and sustenance, and is full of a great treasure of Allah's bounties. Thus, Allah says: '...He is most merciful towards you.' (*an-Nahl*: 66) Allah's Mercy represents Allah's innumerable favours. The One who gives you the land with all its bounties can give you bounties from the sea. The earth upon which we dwell contains dry land and sea. The percentage of the dry land is one fifth of the earth's surface, and the rest of the area is covered by sea which is full of immense bounty from Allah.

There are many ways, in which a person can move on land from one place to another: he can walk or take any means of transport according to his abilities. Some people may ride mules and others ride. As for the sea, you can transverse it only on a vessel. It is out of Allah's Mercy that He has made ships one of His signs. These ships enable us to move smoothly on the sea, and Allah protects them with His Power from drowning.

Prophet Nuh (Noah) is the first person who built a ship with inspiration from Allah. Ships were unknown before him, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And he constructed the ship, and whenever an assembly of the eminent of his people passed by him, they ridiculed him. He said, "if you ridicule us, then we will ridicule you just as you ridicule."' (Hud: 38) People had not known ships before Nuh (Noah) made a primitive one from wooden planks and ropes. If Allah had not guided him to the manner of constructing the ship, he would not have known it. As Allah *Glorified is He* has guided us through one of His Messengers to the construction of the ships, which enable us to benefit from three quarters of the earth, this undoubtedly represents His Mercy and the enhancement of human capabilities.

In addition, Allah has enabled us to further develop and enhance the ship throughout time, a fact that manifests His Mercy. Ships would move along the surface of the water by the wind power using the sail which controls and directs the ship its captain wants. Wind was the original way that moves the ships, but progress and scientific development led to the discovery of steam power and electricity. This has enabled the ships to move easily. Moreover, the construction of ships design has developed throughout the ages so that we see huge multi-level ocean liners which actually resemble mountains. This verifies Allah's saying: 'And of His signs are the ships in the sea, like mountains...' (ash-Shura: 32). Allah gives us a proof of His Knowledge of what the world will arrive at in terms of progress and development of shipbuilding, as ships now resemble mountains. At the time of the revelation of the Quran, there were not any multi-level ocean liners that fit this description. These ships only began to appear after the discovery of Archimedes' principle which enabled the construction of these ships.

In spite of the evolution of maritime navigation, we must never fail to recognize Allah's Power, which enables these ships to traverse the sea and move on the water's surface calmly and peacefully. The human being must guard himself against being deceived by his scientific and technological attainments. He should not regard himself as ruler of creation, as Allah says: 'If He willed, He could still the wind, and they would remain motionless on its surface....' (*ash-Shura*: 33) This is particularly relevant because wind is the original means of powering ships.

If someone were to state now, 'If the wind stops, we would just use some other form of power, such as steam or electricity.' We respond to them by stating: 'You have taken the word 'wind' as it appears in the verse quite literally—that it only applies to air. Yet, if we observe the word wind and how it is glossed, we find that the word 'wind' is a reference to all forms of power; its meaning is not limited to any one form. Considering this, the meaning of 'He stills the wind,' is understood as: He disables the locomotion of the ships. It makes no difference what type of power it is: wind, steam, electricity, or anything else for that matter. The bottom line is that if Allah wants to, He is capable of rendering any of these forms of locomotion inoperative.

After this the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذَا مَسَّكُمُ الضُّرُّ فِي الْبَحْرِ ضَلَّ مَنْ تَدْعُونَ إِلَّا إِلَهُهُ فَلَمَّا
فَجَّكُمْ إِلَى الْبَرِّ أَعْرَضْتُمْ وَكَانَ الْإِنْسَانُ كَفُورًا ﴿١٧﴾

**When you get into distress at sea, those you pray to besides Him
desert you, but when He brings you back safe to land you turn
away: man is ever ungrateful [67] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 67)**

The sea, that intimidating expanse that surrounds man on all sides, if he encounters trouble while being at the sea, it is inescapable. In land, means of rescue from (potential harm) are many. On the other hand, in sea, there is no rescue save that which comes from Providence, i.e. from Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'It is He who enables you to travel on land and sea until, when you are in ships and they sail with them by a good wind and they rejoice therein, there comes a storm wind and the waves come upon them

from everywhere and they assume that they are surrounded, supplicating Allah, sincere to Him in religion.' (*Yunus*: 22) This is a human description; it even applies to the disbeliever. If he is stranded and without a mean for his rescue, he will seek refuge with Allah, the True Saviour and Deliverer from harm. In many instances, the human being will not simply submit (to what appears to be an impending doom), he will remain clinging to the hope that he will be rescued.

The statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'And when adversity touches you at sea, lost are [all] those you invoke except for Him.' This is saying: They are completely imperilled, surrounded by violent winds and billowing waves. In such a circumstance, they are able to sense the imminent danger present in their situation. They realize that the only one who can save them is Allah. As we mentioned before, even ardent disbelievers—when faced with this type of situation—are truthful with themselves. They do not lie to themselves or engage in self-deception. Even if they (the disbelievers) believe in other deities and regularly engage in the worship of idols, when confronted with the like of their present situation they only seek refuge with Allah, and their pleas of desperation are directed solely to Him. They have full knowledge that their gods cannot hear them, and thus are unable to respond to them. In fact, their gods do not possess any power to benefit them or rescue them.

Allah's statement: 'lost are [all] those you invoke except for Him,' indicates that your consideration of those objects that you had erstwhile taken as gods have completely vanished. They have ceased to even enter your thoughts. There is no way that they are now going to say: O Hubal! They will never submit to deceiving themselves in this manner. More succinctly, they are completely unable to hold up the farce (of idolatry) during this frightening moment.

Staring down a tight and compressed situation like the one at hand, they fail to remember these gods; they never even cross their mind. To be sure, if they allowed these gods to so much as cross their mind, it would lessen their singular confidence in Allah—the Only One Who possesses any ability to rescue them. It is He Who can grant the aid and salvation they are seeking.

Previously, we elucidated some of the implications of this issue in the story we narrated about the barber in the countryside. Remember, he was the

person responsible for providing cures for the down-to-earth people of the country. Although he claimed to possess considerable degrees of knowledge and experience, when his son became ill, he wasted no time in consulting a physician. To be frank, just because he can deceive the people about the extent of his expertise, it does not mean that he would attempt to deceive himself. In the same manner, a person does not sell himself short. If he is consumed and overwhelmed by danger, he only resorts to Allah; because He is the Only One Who can relieve that which causes anxiety and offer aid to the one who is weighed down by worry. As we mentioned, this is equally applicable to the disbeliever. In fact, it is Allah has ordered the disbelievers to turn to Him and call on Him: 'Then why, when Our punishment came to them, did they not humble themselves?' (*al-An'am*: 43) This means that if they humble themselves and call upon Him, He will hear their pleas and respond to them even though they are disbelievers who arrogantly reject His invitation to faith. No matter what, they are still His servants and the product of His creative act. This is the unlimited mercy of Allah; it even envelops those who do not believe in Him!

This explains why the Lord of Grandeur said in a Qudsi Hadith: 'The earth spoke and said, "Master, permit me to cave in around the progeny of Adam, they have consumed Your blessings but declined to offer You gratitude." Next, the sky spoke and said, "Permit me to fall above the progeny of Adam, they have enjoyed Your blessings but neglected to offer You thanks." After that, the mountains spoke and said, "O Lord! Give me permission to collapse upon the progeny of Adam, they have consumed your blessings but restrict your thanks." Then, the seas spoke. They offered, "O Lord! Will you not allow me to drown the progeny of Adam, they exult in taking from what you have given them, but fail to show gratefulness." Once everyone had finished, Allah *Glorified is He* answered: "Leave what I have created to Me. If you all were responsible for their creation, you would feel inclined toward being merciful with them. They are my servants. If they repent to Me, I will be beloved to them. However, if they fail to repent to Me, I will rectify them.'"

The True Lord *Glorified is He* forgave their worship of other gods, their ill will toward prophethood, and their attempt to stand in the way of His Message. He allows them to do this because He is the [True] Lord. As long as

He is Lord, He is Merciful. Therefore they can still humble themselves and call on him. Nevertheless, after He delivers them safely to shore, they rebel against His worship. They denounce the realization they had arrived at and commit what essentially amounts to ingratitude for Allah's blessings. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* concludes His statement by saying: 'and ever is man ungrateful.' The word 'ever' refers to someone who is constantly displaying ingratitude for favours. Ruinous, indeed, is the affair of the one who displays ingratitude for the blessings of the Creator; how can he bring himself to say something like, 'It was nature that dictated that this (good thing or in this case, his rescue) would happen as it did'. This constitutes a straightforward act of ungratefulness for something that was clear; something that he witnessed! He experienced the consternation; he sensed just how in jeopardy his predicament had become! Then, after Allah rescues him, he defies Allah and rebels against Him. Although it is sad, it is an accurate description of human nature.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then moves on to say:

أَفَأَمِنْتُمْ أَنْ يُخْسِفَ بِكُمْ جَانِبَ الْبَرِّ أَوْ يُرْسِلَ
عَلَيْكُمْ حَاصِبًا ثُمَّ لَا تَجِدُوا لَكُمْ وَكِيلًا ﴿٦٨﴾

Can you be sure that God will not have you swallowed up into the earth when you are back on land, or that He will not send a sandstorm against you? Then you will find no one to protect you [68] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 68)

We are still discussing those who rebel against Allah after He has rescued them from turbulence on the sea; are they safe from Allah's designs while on land? Are all the things that threaten their existence limited to being at sea? Is Allah *Glorified is He* not capable of putting them in situations that terrify them and present threats to their existence, while they are on land, just as He did, while they were at sea?

Allah *Glorified is He* questions: 'Then do you feel secure that [instead] He will not cause a part of the land?' This is similar to what He said in another place when speaking about the fate that Qarun (Korah) met; He said: 'And thereupon we caused the earth to swallow him and his dwelling.' (*al-Qasas*: 81)

You are not removed from this being your state, if Allah chooses it for you. Even though we have taken to the habit of saying 'land is always safe', we must recognize that this is only relevant when speaking about how we relate to each other and to existence as human beings. On the other hand, if the command of Allah is issued for a calamity of some sort, nothing can prevent its occurrence.

The statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'or send against you a storm of stones?' refers to a wind that carries pebbles and debris. The portion of the verse that reads 'let loose upon you' means that they are being pelted severely with the pebbles. Pebbles can be a form of punishment that cannot be withstood or endured. Therefore Allah *Glorified is He* concluded His statement by saying: 'Then you would not find for yourselves an advocate.' This statement indicates that you will find none to help you (withstand the punishment), nor will you find any to defend you (against it). Accordingly, you should not be deceived into believing that dry land represents your guaranteed security and unthreatened safekeeping. By no means, the peril that I (Allah speaking) can bring upon you is present and you are never distanced from it. It makes no difference whatsoever whether you are on land or sea.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

أَمْ أَمِنْتُمْ أَنْ يُعِيدَكُمْ فِيهِ تَارَةً أُخْرَىٰ فَيُرْسِلَ عَلَيْكُمْ قَاصِفًا مِّنَ
الرَّيْحِ فَيُغْرِقَكُمْ بِمَا كَفَرْتُمْ ثُمَّ لَا تَجِدُوا لَكُمْ عَلَيْنَا بِهِ تَبِيعًا ﴿٦٩﴾

**Or can you be sure that He will not send you back out to sea,
and send a violent storm against you to drown you for being
so ungrateful? You will find no helper against Us there [69]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 69)**

This statement should be understood as such: Even if He has rescued you from the dangers of seafaring that does not necessarily imply that you are safe on land. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* can bring calamity to bear upon you while you are on land. Or for that matter, He can return you to the sea and thus causing you to revisit the fear and consternation that you were removed from the first time. To put it more directly, the verse suggests: Does your being rescued mean that you are now safe?

Turning to Allah's saying: 'and send upon you a hurricane of wind,' we say that a hurricane is a storm which pelts with fury and rage. Additionally, it only occurs on dry land. 'Drown you for what you denied?' As for this part of the verse, it reveals: As a result of your ingratitude for the blessings of Allah and your flagrant denial of His (immense) favour, this can become your plight. This was your response, while the only thing required of you was recognition of Allah—as the source of the good fortune you experienced—and an acknowledgement of His favour.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Then you would not find for yourselves against Us an avenger.' The meaning is: If We (Allah) carried out all that we have spoken of in respect to chastising you, you would never find anyone to avenge what happened to you or to take revenge for you. In essence you have no hope; there is none who can help you, nor is there anyone who can defend or protect you. It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* is saying: I fear not your response to my punishment (whatever that response might be). Indeed, in many instances, human beings refrain from committing certain actions out of fear of a reaction. He sits and thinks a good while; if I punch so and so, eventually, his family will get involved and they might do such and such to me. On the other hand, in respect to the True Lord *Glorified is He* there is no one who can attempt to avenge His punishment or reprisal.

Afterward, the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions:

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنْ
الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا ﴿٧٠﴾

**We have honoured the children of Adam and
carried them by land and sea; We have provided
good sustenance for them and favoured them
specially above many of those We have created [70]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 70)**

Is there any ennoblement the children of Adam have been given that is superior to the fact that the base elements that give their lives substance had been provided for them before they were created? To be sure, Allah

arranged the created order and created many things especially for their (the children of Adam) use: 'It is He who created for you all of that which is on the earth.' As such, all that is in creation was subjected for your use even before you came in to existence. In fact, all of Allah's creatures either serve or are served. As for you—a member of humanity—you are served by every other type of creatures in creation; this even includes the angels. Did the True Lord *Glorified is He* not mention: 'For each one are successive [angels] before and behind him who protect him by the decree of Allah.' (*ar-Ra'd*: 11) For the same intent and purpose, He has also mentioned elsewhere: 'And those who arrange [each] matter.' (*an-Nazi'at*: 5) This means that the entire creation revolves around you and is present to serve you. It (the creation) gives unto you unfailingly and without pause even though you are not required to expend any effort at all in many cases. This explains why we say that the only obligations for the thinking man or woman are simply reflection and contemplation; this is all that is needed to arrive at a solution to the impossible riddle that is creation. With this alone, you can discern that there is an Intelligent Creator. It is sufficient for you to observe the signs of Allah: Do they not serve me although I have no power or dominion over them? The sun, moon, stars, soil, air, water, rain, clouds, all of them give me and are extended unto me Yet, I have no power over them. Who has arranged all of this for me? I can see that no person is crazy enough to claim them for himself!

O human, when one of your own, cries out to you, 'I am a Messenger from the Lord; the One responsible for bringing all of this (the created order) into existence', it is your responsibility to lend him an attentive ear and hear him out. Indeed, he is the one capable of removing you from the confusing conundrum that (witnessing) creation has landed you in.

Fittingly, the only obligation of the human being is to use his ability to think and his mind to interact with the elements of creation that have been subjected to his use and placed at his fingertips. These elements do not act according to his order nor do they submit to his power.

The scholars have differed in their attempt to locate the precise areas of human ennoblement. Some of them have concluded that the human being was

ennobled through the gift of intellect. Others have averred that human nobility can be traced to the ability to use discernment. ‘The gift of free will’ some have offered as the source of human ennoblement. Some have commented that walking upright as opposed to tilted toward the ground—like an animal—is the principle source of human nobility. Interestingly, some scholars have highlighted the shape of the human hand, in its possessing a shape that gives it the ability to handle things with ease, as a starting place for human ennoblement. Observantly, some have pointed out the fact that a human being eats with his hand as opposed to his mouth—like a beast—as the form of ennoblement. In this way, each has cited an aspect of the human ennoblement.⁽¹⁾

Within this discourse about the source of human ennoblement, we also have a position we would like the scholars to survey. How can they neglect it when it is none other than: To be sure, the True Lord *Glorified is He* created the entire creation by the word (Be!) which emanated from Him; the only exception to this was Adam *peace be upon him*. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* created Adam with His own hand and breathed His spirit into him. Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘What prevented you from prostrating to that which I created with My hands?’ (*Sad*: 75) He also said: ‘And when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My [created] soul, then fall down to him in prostration.’” (*al-Hijr*: 29) The absolute apex of the favour and nobility that Allah has given the human being rest in Allah’s creating our father Adam *peace be upon him* with His hand. This is proven by the fact that Allah has made it an element of his distinction.

After this, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

(1) In his *Tafsir* (5/4022), *Al-Qurtubi* mentioned: *The correct position—that which is relied upon—offers that the true source of human ennoblement is the intellect: It is the basis upon which all moral responsibility is predicated. With it, Allah is known, His Word comprehended, His Paradise arrived at, and His Messengers believed. In fact, only after it (the intellect) proved itself incapable of guiding the servant to the performance of all that was required of him, the Messengers were dispatched and the Scriptures were revealed.*

يَوْمَ نَدْعُوا كُلَّ أُنَاسٍ بِإِمِّمِهِمْ فَمَنْ أُوتِيَ كِتَابَهُ يَمِينًا
فَأُولَئِكَ يَفْرَحُونَ كِتَابَهُمْ وَلَا يَظْلَمُونَ فَتِيلًا



On the Day when We summon each community, along with its leader, those who are given their record in their right hand will read it [with pleasure]. But no one will be wronged in the least [71] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 71)

This is referring to the Day of Judgment. The one who summons someone is, of course, responsible for calling them. The people, in this situation, are being called forth. The call that is issued onto them on this Day will not be according to a given name and surname; rather, He will call each people by its leader, that is to say, their Messengers. So, it will be said, 'O Nation of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*', 'O Nation of Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*'; 'O Nation of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*.' O Nation of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*.' Afterward, He will separate this initial group of peoples. Each group of people will be called by the name of the person responsible for conveying the message unto them and guiding them. The purpose of this is to encourage people to convey knowledge among them.

Some of them have interpreted the piece of the verse that reads (*imam*) as: their mothers. Within this manner of summoning people by the names of their mothers we find that it is first and foremost an honour for Isa *peace be upon him*. Additionally, it is a means of covering the affair of children that were conceived illegitimately. Indeed, this prevents their affair from being exposed to onlookers during a moment as tense as that one.

Afterward, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Then whoever is given his record in his right hand - those will read their records, and injustice will not be done to them, [even] as much as a thread [inside the date seed]. This indicates that the act of receiving the record with the right hand is a fortuitous sign and it establishes the commencement of everlasting peace. Of course, the one who receives the record in his right hand wastes no time at all in reading his record. In fact, after taking it, he proudly proclaims among the people: "Come you all, Read my record!"' (*al-Haqqa*: 19) Certainly, he is thrilled

(with the outcome) of his righteous actions. As such, he loves for people to know what his records consisted of.

Taking a closer look at the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'and injustice will not be done to them, [even] as much as a thread [inside the date seed],' we find that injustice consists of taking from the good fortune of others that which you do not possess. For example, you have a deficiency in a certain area; despite this, you still desire to be compensated (as though you were not deficient in that area). This is injustice. The question then becomes: In what way is the True Lord *Glorified is He* deficient that He would cause (even with a stretch of the imagination) injustice to the creation? As a description, injustice is only applicable to the actions of created things. If truth be told, in many instances, the human being is discontent with what Allah has apportioned for him. This is what gives rise to the feelings of inferiority and deficiency that cause him to oppress others. As for the True Lord, He is completely independent of His creation. Thus, how can He oppress them? To add to the implausibility of such a conclusion (that Allah could never oppress His creation), we only need to consider the fact that He *Glorified is He* has granted them everything they own.

As for the meaning of the phrase 'as much as a thread,' the True Lord *Glorified is He* uses parables within the Quran which reflect an inherent familiarity to the Arab and his environment. One of the things the Arabs are most familiar with is Dates. It is their favourite form of physical nourishment and fodder for their grazing animals. From the Date, the Quran has mentioned: *naqir*, *qatmir*, and *fatil*. These are three things which you find in the pit or kernel of a fruit and the Quran has used them to convey a sense of the minuscule and minute.

The *naqir*⁽¹⁾: The tiny cavernous spot on its pit.

(1) *The utterance naqir has appeared in the Quran in two places: 'Or have they a share of dominion? Then [if that were so], they would not give the people [even as much as] naqir [the speck on a date seed].'* (an-Nisa': 53) and *'And whoever does righteous deeds, whether male or female, while being a believer - those will enter Paradise and will not be wronged, [even as much as] naqir [the speck on a date seed].'* (an-Nisa': 124)

The *qatmir*⁽¹⁾: The thin transparent pellicle that appears between its pit and its flesh.

The *fatil*: The thin thread-like substance which lines the groove of its pit.

The meaning is that Allah *Glorified is He* would never oppress people. Without doubt, He *Glorified is He* is far removed from oppressing anyone, even in the smallest amount imaginable.

The fate which lies at the other end of the spectrum—the one that does not receive his record in the right hand; but instead receives it in the left hand—is not mentioned in this verse. Nevertheless, a description of this reality has occurred in Allah's statement: 'But as for him whose record shall be placed in his left hand, he will exclaim, "Oh, would that I had never been shown my record."' (*al-Haqqa*: 25) Within a separate verse, Allah said: 'But as for him whose record shall be given to him behind his back.' (*al-Inshiqaq*: 10)

Turning to the verse currently under consideration, the True Lord *Glorified is He* said:

وَمَنْ كَانَتْ فِي هَذِهِ أَعْمَىٰ فَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ أَعْمَىٰ وَأَضَلُّ سَبِيلًا ﴿٧٢﴾

Those who were blind in this life will be blind in the Hereafter, and even further off the path [72]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 72)

This is the unfortunate counterpart of the one who receives his record in his right hand. Indeed, he was devoid of all insight in this life; accordingly, he is now deprived of vision in the Hereafter. If this is an accurate description of his state, he can be assured that he belongs to the group of the Left. At times, the verses mention the causes that led to this being his situation and other times they mention the effects of this being his fortune. It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* is saying: The one who will receive his record in his right hand, read it and proudly tout it among people was not without insight during this life. On the contrary, he was insightful and (spiritually) conscious; he was

(1) The utterance *qatmir* occurs in the Quran on one occasion: 'And those whom you invoke other than Him do not possess [as much as] the membrane of a date seed.' (*Fatir*: 13)

guided unto the way of Allah, and (upon reaching it) made the wise decision to tread its path. Subsequently, this is the outcome of his choice; this is his reward.

Conversely, the one who will receive his record in his left hand was completely devoid of insight during this life. There is a sharp contrast between spiritual blindness (being without spiritual insight) and physical blindness. Physical blindness refers to the inability to perceive visible phenomena due to a lack of vision. The disbelievers in this life can perceive the visible objects that exist around them. They can grasp the material realities of life. In terms of their spiritual insight, on the other hand, they have been divested of it; they cannot see good nor can they recognize the path of guidance.

Previously, we asserted that the human being, in order to proceed within life upon a straight course, is in absolute need of vision; this is what enables him to see the material objects that he encounters. Certainly, it is his vision which prevents him from colliding with something stationary—and thereby injuring himself—or running into something fragile—and thereby destroying that thing. As such, vision is a gift from Allah that has been given to the generality of human beings; believers and disbelievers alike. However, alongside the blessing of vision we find another immense blessing. It is the fruit of the Divine, and it is only given to believers. Can we be referring to anything besides spiritual insight; being able to ‘see’ the values that the human being acquires from the Way of Allah once he submits to it and walks upon the path of guidance it provides.

The statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘will be blind in the Hereafter and more astray in way.’ If his blindness in this life was spiritual blindness, his blindness in the Hereafter will be physical. To be sure, spiritual insight is only required in this life; it is with it that the good is distinguished from the bad. Furthermore, it is upon it (spiritual insight) that all righteous action is predicated. Yet, within the Hereafter there is no domain of righteous action. In view of that, we can conclude that the blindness of the Hereafter is physical blindness. Just as Allah *Glorified is He* has mentioned in different verses: ‘whoever follows My guidance will neither go astray [in the world] nor suffer [in the Hereafter]. And whoever turns away from My remembrance - indeed, he will have a depressed life, and We will gather him on the Day of

Resurrection blind.’ (*Ta Ha*: 123-124) In another place, Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned about them: ‘We shall gather them on the Day of Resurrection, [they will lie] prone upon their faces, blind, dumb and deaf’ (*al-Isra'*: 97).

Despite this, someone might be led to comment: But there are other verses that seem to suggest that they will be able to use their vision in the Hereafter, such as: ‘until the time when they behold that [doom] of which they were forewarned.’ (*Maryam*: 75)

In this respect, you can also cite: ‘And the criminals will see the Fire and will be certain that they are to fall therein.’ (*al-Kahf*: 53) In order to join between these different sets of verses and observe the conformity that exists among them, we offer the following: In terms of physical vision on the Day of Judgment, the disbelievers will experience two distinct phases. The first is rising from the grave and being driven to the Place of Reckoning. During this phase they will be blind, deaf, and dumb. This will intensify their confusion and increase their fright. Indeed, they will be consumed in commotion of truly epic proportions, but they will not have a clue as to what is happening or where they are being carried. Imagine, all this will be taking place and they will not be able to hear a word from anyone. This is the extent to which they are in alarm and bewilderment; yet, they know nothing. This is the phase of their blindness, deafness, and dumbness.

As for the second phase, it finds them with vision. This phase will begin when the True Lord *Glorified is He* manifests Himself to the people of the Place of Reckoning and removes the veil of His Glory. At this point, the disbelievers will become as though their vision has not only returned, but is now much sharper than before. Ironically, the thing they will see will be their place in the fire.

Here, we should consider the relation between ‘blind’ and ‘and more astray from the path.’ The blindness in the Hereafter is worse than blindness in this life. As we mentioned, blindness in the Hereafter has a far more profound impact on leading one astray.

As for the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘and more astray from the path,’ it can be taken for granted that he had gone astray in this life. However, how can he go farther astray in the Hereafter?

Some have mentioned in this regard: Indeed, during his misguidance in this life, the possibility that he would return to the Way—the Straight Path—and end his period of deviance was always present. On the other hand, in the Hereafter there is no possibility of self-correction; his state of being misguided is conclusive. The time of choice (the choice to follow the Path or go astray) has effectively come to a conclusion. Therefore, he is farther astray and more misguided in the Hereafter than he was during this life.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says⁽¹⁾:

وَأِنْ كَادُوا لَيَفْتِنُونَكَ عَنِ الَّذِي أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ لِيُفْتَرِيَ
عَلَيْنَا غَيْرُهُ وَإِذَا لَا تَأْخُذُكَ خَلِيلًا

[Prophet], the disbelievers tried to tempt you away from what We revealed to you, so that you would invent some other revelation and attribute it to Us and then they would have taken you as a friend [73] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 73)

We are being introduced to yet another of the despicable characteristics the non-believers displayed when dealing with the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They were serious in their attempts to dissuade him from proclaiming that with which Allah dispatched him. On occasion, they would say, ‘Leave us to our gods, we will indulge them for a year and reap the material benefits their shrines bring us. We also desire that you (Muhammad) make our territory (*Thaqif*) a sacred precinct in the same way

(1) Addressing the cause of the following verse, Ibn 'Abbas mentioned: It was revealed concerning the *Thaqif* delegation. They approached the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, ‘It would please us if you allowed us to pay homage to our gods for a year. And we would like you to make our valleys sacred precincts just as you have made Mecca a sacred precinct. This means that sacrosanct status should be extended to their trees, birds, and beast (like those of Mecca).’ The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* rejected this offer; in fact, he did not even respond to them. At this, Allah revealed this verse. Sa'id ibn Jubayr said, ‘The idolaters said to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* “We will not desist (from persecuting you) until you ‘embrace’ our gods, even if it is only with the tips of your fingers.”’ The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘There would be no transgression on my part if I did; certainly, Allah knows that I’ am devoted to Him (alone).’ This is the point at which Allah *Glorified is He* revealed this verse.

that you have declared Mecca a sacred precinct.' On a different occasion, they offered, 'You will not receive a stone and they will prevent its being given until their gods are appeased.'

The meaning of (*Kadu*, endeavour to) is that they came close to. This is not an indication that they almost succeeded at performing the action. By no means, this is simply an indication that they began to plan its execution. In the end, however, it did not happen. The meaning then becomes: Indeed, they were coming to the point where they would try to tempt you from what was revealed to you, but it did not happen. Their attempt (even as they understood it) was a long shot. It was based on an effort to create a trial for you in your faith. They made hapless propositions such as: 'We will worship your Allah for a year and in exchange, you will worship our gods for a year.'⁽¹⁾

As for the meaning of 'tempt you away', it refers to their attempt to shift you (Muhammad) or turn you away from what Allah has revealed to you. Nonetheless, the question is: Why? It is 'in order to [make] you invent about Us something else.' This is the same reality the Quran recounts from them in a different verse: 'Bring us a Quran other than this or change it.' (*Yunus*: 15) The response of the True Lord *Glorified is He* was as follows: 'Say, [O Muhammad], "It is not for me to change it on my own accord. I only follow what is revealed to me. Indeed, I fear, if I should disobey my Lord, the punishment of a tremendous Day."' (*Yunus*: 15) Allah *Glorified is He* also said: 'Say, "If Allah had willed, I would not have recited it to you, nor would He have made it known to you, for I had remained among you a lifetime before it. Then will you not reason?"' (*Yunus*: 16)

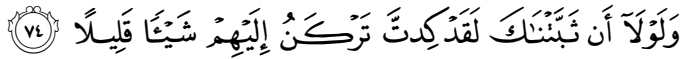
(1) *Ibn Jarir and Ibn Abu Hatim at-Tabarani narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas may Allah be pleased with them who said: 'Indeed, Quraysh called upon the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him with the intention of giving him money. They offered him enough money to make him the wealthiest man in Mecca. They even offered to marry him off to whomever he wanted from among their women. They said to him, "This is for you Muhammad; just desist from cursing our gods and refrain from speaking ill of them. However, if you do not want to abide by those conditions, we have another offer for you; one we think you will find agreeable. The Prophet asked, "And what is that?" They responded, "Worship our gods for a year and in exchange, we will worship your Allah for a year." At this, the revelation descended; it contained Allah's words: "Say, "O disbelievers, I do not worship what you worship." (al-Kafirun: 1-2)' This was cited by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-manthur (8/654).*

Within the stance that is being articulated in this verse, we notice that the True Lord *Glorified is He* is removing burden from His Messenger. He shifts the affair from the domain of the Messenger to His domain. This is done so that animosity and tension do not arise between Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his people. The source of this affair is not Muhammad; its source is none other than Allah Himself. Allah *Glorified is He* mentions: 'We know that you, [O Muhammad], are saddened by what they say. And indeed, they do not call you untruthful, but it is the verses of Allah that the wrongdoers reject.' (*al-An'am*: 33) 'So, there is no reason to feel sad (O Muhammad)! You are regarded as a trustworthy person among them. Nevertheless, this affair is Mine; it is with Me!' This is the manner in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* removed the burdens off His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. He left the people with no room to direct their hatred toward the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions: 'and then they would have taken you as a friend.' The friend is a companion with whom you share great love and affection. This is so to such an extent that it is almost as if each one of you is completely absorbed and immersed in the other. This statement of Allah is an example of this: 'And Allah took Abraham as an intimate friend.' (*an-Nisa'*: 125)

The meaning of the verse under consideration then becomes: If you renounce the Way that has come to you from Allah, you will have become beloved to them, in the same way that you were beloved to them before. If truth be told, they used to feel great affection toward you. Indeed, they were fond of saying 'The Truthful and Trustworthy' when addressing you. As such, the only thing that has pushed them to assume this stance of hostility toward you is the Way of Allah that you advocate. If you denounce it or at least water it down, they will come to regard you as one of their beloved again. Despite this, do not set your sights on becoming beloved to them; on the contrary, set your sights on being loved by your Lord. Indeed, it is He that sent you—as a Messenger.

Addressing His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:



If We had not made you stand firm, you would almost have inclined a little towards them [74] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 74)

The one who intently ponders in this verse finds that it contains many safeguards for the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. Upon a closer look, we recognize that the verse did not say, 'If it was not for Our support in establishing you (upon the truth), you would have inclined toward them.' On the contrary; 'you would have inched toward inclining to them.' This means that even his (The Messenger of Allah) inching toward inclining to them was prevented from occurring. As for actual inclination, such a thing is unfathomable and unimaginable in respect to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. To put it more frankly, it could never happen. Yet, in spite of that, Allah *Glorified is He* affirmed understanding with His words: 'a little.' What is intended here is a 'little inclination.'

In fact, this reveals that the nature of Allah's Messenger—even without revelation from Allah—is well balanced and instinctive. If we were to imagine a scenario in which he was not supported by Allah (upon the truth), what would be able to expect from the Messenger of Allah? The only thing that would have happened is that he would come close to inclining to them slightly. Earlier, we said that coming close to something means that one begins to consider (the implications of a particular action). However, in the end, it does not take place. All of these occurrences paint a very distinct portrait of the Messenger of Allah. He has a personality and feelings but can act independent of them when the truth demands.

In terms of the meaning of 'strengthened you,' it means to make a person or thing unyielding and secure. The word 'inclined' as it is used here is derived from the inclination that a person displays toward something which might provide him with security and protection. Indeed, people construct walls in order to protect their valuables. Consider this: If a person wants to seek protection by means of a wall, he props his back up against it; in this he has succeeded in protecting his back. Now that his back is secure, nothing can approach him from behind; nonetheless, if he wants to protect all four sides,

he needs to retreat to a corner—recline, in other words. Once inside the (tight space of a) corner, he can lean against it and feel secure concerning that which is in front of him; the wall to the right is protecting one of his flanks and the wall to the left is protecting the other.

Within the verse we are currently discussing, the True Lord *Glorified is He* desired to draw out the resentment the enemies of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* harboured for him in their hearts. To be sure, He *peace and blessings be upon him* was eager to see his people guided and united. As a result, he would bring a tremendous burden upon himself and assume more responsibility for the actualization of this goal than he could rightfully claim. This is what informed his incident of overlooking 'Abdullah ibn Um Maktum *may Allah be pleased with him* who had come to him enquiring about Islam: He only overlooked him because he was trying to communicate with the notables among the Quraysh. At this, his Lord *Glorified is He* informed him of the misstep he was making in assuming too much responsibility⁽¹⁾ (for the guidance of his people).

In the present verse, it is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* is saying, 'People! If, indeed, Muhammad fails to comply with what you want, in terms of abandoning the revelation that was sent to him by his Lord, pardon him. In truth, his firmness and unwillingness to yield are from Me. Muhammad is not displaying disregard for you when he refuses to comply with your wishes.' For example, this would be very similar to if you had a servant who committed some type of error; you want to hold him responsible for his mistake but then you recall, 'Wait a minute; I am the one who charged him with the responsibility and commanded him to do (whatever action). In essence, this is really my issue; the servant should accrue no blame at all for what he committed.'

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

(1) *Allah Glorified is He* said to him concerning this: 'The Prophet frowned and turned away. Because there came to him the blind man, [interrupting]. But what would make you perceive, [O Muhammad], that perhaps he might be purified. Or be reminded and the remembrance would benefit him? As for he who thinks himself without need. To him you give attention. And not upon you [is any blame] if he will not be purified. But as for he who came to you striving [for knowledge], while he fears [Allah]; From him you are distracted.' ('Abasa: 1-10)

إِذَا لَأَذَقْنَاكَ ضِعْفَ الْحَيَاةِ وَضِعْفَ الْمَمَاتِ ثُمَّ لَا تَجِدُ لَكَ عَلَيْنَا نَصِيرًا ﴿٧٥﴾

In that case, We would have made you taste a double punishment in this life, and a double punishment after death and then you would have found no one to help you against Us [75] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 75)

If you would have inched toward inclining to them even slightly, Allah would have doubled your punishment in this life as well as in that after death.' With this warning, the True Lord *Glorified is He* effectively removed the resentment for Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that had taken root in the hearts of his people. Instead, He directed it to Himself *Glorified is He*.

As for the meaning of 'double [punishment in] life and double [after] death,' it is issuing an amount that would normally be equivalent to that spread over two occasions on a single occasion. Returning to the specific context of the verse, this (doubling) would have to be taken to imply that He (The Prophet) would be made to experience nothing but punishment in this life. In actual effect, this is asserting: 'I would have punished you twice the usual amount within this life and twice the usual amount after death.' Nevertheless, this begs the question: Why would the punishment have been doubled in respect to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? It is said that the underlying reason for this (warning of additional punishment) is the Prophet's being the greatest example (of proper conduct) and the model of moral excellence for humanity. In light of this elevated position, it is totally impossible that the like of this action could have been committed by him. In a few words, we can confidently say that it is inconceivable (that anything like that could have been done by Allah's Messenger). However, if something like this was even fathomable, it would have led to a double punishment on his part.

This verse is similar to that which Allah *Glorified is He* directed to the Prophet's wives when He said: 'O wives of the Prophet, whoever of you should commit a clear immorality - for her the punishment would be doubled two fold, and ever is that, for Allah, easy.' (*al-Ahzab*: 30) This warning was issued on account of their being members of the Household of Prophethood and the Mothers of the Believers. Indeed, they too are an example for Muslim

women. We notice that every promotion in rank or position within the domain of calling to Allah is accompanied by a greater responsibility to keep oneself clear of indiscretions. To be sure, in this position his behaviour will be taken as an example; should he display misguidance, there is no way that the effect of that misguidance will be limited to himself. Quite the reverse, others will follow his lead and therefore and become misguided. This is what accounts for Allah's mentioning more rigid (albeit hypothetical) compounded punishments for the Prophet and his wives.

Afterward, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Then you would not find for yourself against Us a helper.' That is to say, 'You would not have found anyone to defend you. Nor would you have found anyone to aid you. Indeed, your security and welfare can only be assured by Me. As such, how could anyone besides Me help you?'

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says⁽¹⁾:

وَأِنْ كَادُوا لَيَسْتَفِزُّوكَ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ لِيُخْرِجُوكَ مِنْهَا
وَإِذَا لَا يَلْبَثُونَ خَلْفَكَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا

**They planned to scare you off the land, but they would not
have lasted for more than a little while after you [76]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 76)**

Again, using 'about to' means that they came close to performing the action. It is understood that they were not bold enough to go through with it or they were not able to. So, this is simply expressing the idea of coming close to performing a given action. They will try to exile you; yet, you will not leave except when My will dictates.'

(1) *As for the occurrences that led to the revelation of this verse, Mujahid and Qatada mentioned, 'This was revealed in respect to the people of Mecca who had begun considering exiling the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him. If they had exiled him, they would have only been allowed to stay comfortably upon the land for a short amount of time. However, in the end, Allah ordered him to migrate, and he left voluntarily.' In his Tafsir (5/4030) Al-Qurtubi mentioned: 'This is the most correct position because this chapter was revealed in the Meccan phase of the Prophetic Mission. That which precedes it addresses the people of Mecca and there is not a single mention of the Jewish community.'*

Allah's statement: 'drive you from the land to evict you therefrom,' means that they will attempt to drive you to leave Mecca by displaying ill will toward you and abusing you. The disbelievers of Mecca knew that the Prophet's departure would mean that they could rest. At the very least, his absence would mean that he could not continue to be an inspiration to the slaves and downtrodden among their people. Indeed, it was they who loved him and were positively predisposed to accepting the religion he was promoting.

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions: 'And then [when they do], they will not remain [there] after you, except for a little.' This is saying: If they exile you from Mecca, they will only remain in it after your departure for a short period of time. In fact, this is what happened when the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* finally did leave Mecca. In the year that the campaign of *Badr* (which occurred just two years after the Prophet's departure) was waged, seventy of the notables of the Quraysh were killed and seventy others were taken captive. This means that after the departure of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from Mecca, they were not allowed to live comfortably within its confines nor enjoy the unhindered dominance that they were seeking through driving him out.

After this, the True Lord *Glorified is He* continues:

سُنَّةَ مَنْ قَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا قَبْلَكَ مِنْ رُسُلِنَا وَلَا تَجِدُ لِسِتِنَا تَحْوِيلًا ﴿٧٧﴾

**Such was Our way with the messengers We sent before
you, and you will find no change in Our ways [77]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 77)**

The True Lord *Glorified is He* is making it clear that which took place was one of His many Ways that He ordains in dealing with the Messengers. This is similar to His statement: 'And Our word has already preceded for Our servants, the messengers. [That] indeed, they would be those given victory, And [that] indeed, Our soldiers will be those who overcome.' (*as-Saffat*: 171-173) It was their (the disbelievers of Mecca) duty to find some sense of moral admonition in what occurred with the Messengers of the past. In this, we are referring to how their enemies and detractors were confounded by the wrath of Allah.

Indeed, Allah sent the Messengers, and although they were declared liars, aggressed against, and persecuted, they were, nonetheless, granted victory by Allah and made triumphant in the end.

As for the 'established way', it refers to a habitual practice which is not abandoned nor altered. This explains why Allah *Glorified is He* follows the mention of His Way by stating: 'and you will not find in Our way any alteration.' Undeniably, the only way that a particular way (of doing something) is changed or altered is by someone powerful enough to challenge the established way by initiating his new way of doing things. If a way is attributed to Allah, it goes without saying that it is rooted in sufficient power. In fact, it is rooted in the strongest power; indeed, it is only Allah *Glorified is He* who is capable of this alteration. There is absolutely no one who can change the Ways of Allah. When Allah *Glorified is He* speaks, He only issues the truth, for which there is no substitute or challenge to His authority.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has just rounded out a discussion of belief in the attributes of divinity, conviction in prophethood, and the Day of Judgment along with the necessity of certainty in it. Also, within His discussion concerning the Day of Judgment, He directed focus to the act of receiving the record of one's deeds. Now, the True Lord *Glorified is He* desires to give us the fruit of this Way and (make clear) its ultimate effect: Establishing an (equitable and decent) way of life for us and organizing our progression and development. This Divine Way has come to us in the form that primarily consists of rulings. Yet, those rulings also contain a distinctive set of fundamental practices, it was these that were summed up in the Prophet's statement, 'Islam is built upon five pillars: the testimony of faith—There is nothing worthy of worship but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*—the establishment of the daily-prayer, the annual giving of *zakat*, fasting the month of Ramadan and pilgrimage to the House, for who can afford it [physically and financially].'⁽¹⁾ From this, it should be sufficiently clear that these represent the pillars upon which Islam is built. However, the only thing that seems to be in question is: What do these pillars

(1) Narrated by Muslim in his *Sahih* (16), Al-Bukhari in his *Sahih* (8) from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Umar may Allah be pleased with them.

mean to the individual Muslim? If you think deeply upon this question, you will find that we all have a share in the testimony of faith: There is nothing worthy of worship besides Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. As for the prayer, none are exempt from it for any reason. It is a perpetual obligation, recurring five times throughout the day.

In terms of the rest of the pillars, which are: *zakat*, fasting, and pilgrimage to the House, the conditions that make them a requirement do not apply to everyone. As such, the indigent person is not required to pay *zakat* or make the pilgrimage to the House, and the infirm is not required to fast (the month of Ramadan). Therefore, we observe the presence of two categories: Pillars of Islam and Pillars of the Muslim. Simply put, the pillars of the individual Muslim are the testimony of faith and the establishment of the daily-prayer. Paying *zakat*, fasting, or making pilgrimage to the House might also be included (if the conditions of their being an obligation are met). When a Muslim performs all the 'pillars', he has brought his pillars into conformity with the pillars of Islam

Furthermore, the testimony of faith—which is from among the pillars of Islam, —we find that it suffices one if he simply says it (with sincerity and without ever recanting) one time. Again, as we mentioned, there is a possibility that the conditions that make paying *zakat*, fasting, or making pilgrimage to the House an obligation might not be fulfilled in respect to a particular individual. So, in fact, there is really nothing that remains beside the prayer. This explains why it has been made the foundation of the faith⁽¹⁾.

Afterward, Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned:

(1) *This is articulated in the Hadith that reads: 'The prayer is the foundation of the faith. The one who establishes it establishes the faith. Conversely, the one who destroys it destroys his faith.'* Within his sourcing of the Hadith (1/147) included in the *Ihya*, Al-Hafiz Al-'Iraqi said, 'It was narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in *Shu'ab* with a weak chain of transmission from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of 'Umar.' In the work entitled *Al-Asrar Al-Marfu'a* (n. 578), Mulla 'Ali Al-Qari said, 'Ibn As-Salah mentioned in *Mushkil Al-wasit* that this Hadith was not well-known. In *At-Tanqih*, Nawawi mentioned: Indeed, this Hadith is false and baseless. Nonetheless, Daylimi narrated it on the authority of 'Ali, this is what was narrated by As-Suyuti in *Ad-Durur Al-Muntathira* (p.279)

أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِذُلُوكِ الشَّمْسِ إِلَى غَسَقِ اللَّيْلِ وَقُرْآنَ
 الْفَجْرِ إِنَّ قُرْآنَ الْفَجْرِ كَانَ مَشْهُودًا ﴿٧٨﴾

**So perform the regular prayers in the period from the time
 the sun is past its zenith till the darkness of the night,
 and [recite] the Quran at dawn – dawn recitation is always
 witnessed [78] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 78)**

As we mentioned, the prayer is established and a recurring obligation in the religious life of the Muslim. The Muslim is never exempted from the prayer under any circumstances. In essence, it is a clear articulation of faith and loyal submission to Allah every day, five times a day. Additionally, it contains elements from all of the other pillars of Islam. For example, during the prayer, you mention the testimony of faith, you bear witness: There is nothing worthy of worship besides Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. So instead of merely mentioning it one time to satisfy the obligation of faith, you mention it many times each day within each prayer. That would make one pillar.

Furthermore, prayer encompasses fasting in its broader sense. Certainly, the person should refrain from eating during prayer as he is abstained from indulging into both the gluttony and sexual desires. Obviously, one is prohibited from engaging in any action that is not related to the prayer while he is performing it, such as being engaged in external conversation.

Moreover, prayer formulates the concept of *zakat* (the alms-giving to the poor). In fact, the money that you earn is consequently *zakat*-able (due to be paid as *zakat*) and is only gained through exerting effort, which in turn consumes time. When someone prays, he is literally sacrificing his time during the prayer which is even more expressive kind of *zakat* than that of giving alms. In the same manner, prayer also develops the concept of pilgrimage because it requires that the person should direct towards the *qibla* (direction that should be faced by the Muslim during prayer), where he conceptually beholds the image of the Holy *Ka'ba* and maintains the impression of pilgrimage.

Thus, prayer is worthy to be described as the fundamental pillar of faith; whoever establishes it establishes faith, otherwise faith is destroyed. Therefore,

prayer has been accorded high priority in terms of Islamic rulings. As Allah *the Exalted* says: 'So perform the regular prayers...' (*al-Isra'*: 78), i.e. establish the prayer with excellence at due times.

The prayer is distinct from other pillars of Islam; all religious obligations were revealed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* through Divine inspiration except prayer. It has exclusively become a religious duty commanded directly by Allah; the matter which indicates its overwhelming importance. This is as previously illustrated resembles the employer who regularly telephones the employee to give him orders. However, the former only summons the latter to highlight crucial issues and to be sure that he fully understands the directives to be done; surely, to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection.

Similarly, the prayer has become an obligation imposed directly by Allah on Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and on his Ummah due to its importance and predominance among other religious obligations. Afterwards, Angel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* took up the task of teaching Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the way to perform the prayer, who in return taught it to the people. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* told them, 'Offer your prayers in the way you saw me offering my prayers'.⁽¹⁾

Allah mentions that He *the Almighty* sets the appointed times of prayer: '... In the period from *duluk* (the time the sun is past its zenith)...' (*al-Isra'*: 78). The word *duluk* (the time when the sun is past its zenith) has a core meaning of moving from one position to another. Therefore, the Arabic word *mudallakati* (masseur: the professional massage therapist) is a derivative from *duluk* because the masseur moves his hands from a position to another.

The intended meaning of *duluk* is that the sun passes its zenith and tilts from the middle of the sky towards the direction of its eventual setting. When the human being looks to the horizon, he sees it widely broaden if he has strong eyesight, but he sees it narrow if he has weak one. Thus, it is said 'a man of narrow horizons' to describe the fatuous person.

(1) It was narrated in *Sahih Al-Bukhari* (631), in *Musnad Ahmad* (5/53), excerpted from the Hadith narrated by Malik ibn Hurayth Allah be pleased with him.

When the person gazes upon the sky, he sees it like a hemisphere and he is in the centre of the circle. The time when the sun is perpendicular to him, this is the time that the sun has passed its zenith. As the sun begins to tilt westwards, it is said that it has broken the zenith. This indicates that the time of *azh-Zhuhr* (the Noon Prayer) has begun. On investigating the matter, it is found that after the obligation of prayer on Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, the noon was the first prayer time prayed by the Messenger. Indeed, this is because the prayer was made an obligation upon him in the heavens during the Night Ascension. Thus, the first prayer time that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* encountered after his return was that of the Noon. Afterwards, Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘... Till the darkness of the night...’ (*al-Isra’*: 78). This means that establishing prayer extends from the time when the sun passes its zenith until the darkness of the night. During this time span, the prayers of *azh-Zhuhr* (the Noon), *al-’Asr* (Late Afternoon), *al-Maghrib* (Sunset), and *al-’Isha* (Night) are established. The only prayer that remains is that of *al-Fajr* (Dawn). Mentioning it, Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘... And [recite] the Quran at dawn— dawn recitation is always witnessed’ (*al-Isra’*: 78). Concerning this particular reference, there is a question raised about the reason of mentioning the Quran recitation at dawn without specifically referring to the Dawn prayer. In response to this, some have assumed that because the recitation of Quran has immense value at the dawn, especially in the light of tranquillity and serenity experienced at that time. The person really receives the message of the Quran with full awareness before being involved into life’s activity because: ‘... Dawn recitation is always witnessed’ (*al-Isra’*: 78). This means that dawn recitation is witnessed by angels. Thus, witnessing Quran recitation is an act of worship for those creatures (the angels) who have not been charged with the responsibility of performing the congregational prayer but is valuably considered by Allah. However, the presence of the people charged with the responsibility of praying is incomparably appreciated.

Allah *Glorified is He* has imbued the congregational prayer with the real meaning of worship. In the congregational prayer, all people are equal; regardless of their social standing or status. As soon as they enter the mosque and take off their shoes, the superior stands shoulder to shoulder with the subordinate.

Thus, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prohibited people from reserving special places for themselves in the mosque.⁽¹⁾ Basically, the Muslim is supposed to take his seat in the nearest available space in the mosque; he is seated according to the order of his arrival. The earlier he arrives at the mosque, the more favourable his position (in the mosque) will be. Absolutely, there is no reason to step over others⁽²⁾ or to squeeze in between two people⁽³⁾ to get a more preferable place.

For example, many people attending the prayer are observed rushing and unfolding their personal prayer mat in the first row to reserve a place and then go off on their errand. Once they find themselves late for the prayer, they push and shove others in order to get to their reserved place. Indeed, this behaviour is fundamentally rejected in mosques as they are the Houses of Allah where all people are treated on equal footing and where worship and devotion to Allah should be realised in their deepest and truest sense. Conceivably, the person prays next to someone and on another day, he will pray next to someone else, where each one, bowing and prostrating, is expressing his submission to Allah. Thus, it is inappropriate for anyone to show an attitude of superiority over the other.

In the same manner, this essential meaning of worship is observed within the rites of *Al-Hajj* (the pilgrimage). Notable figures and highly esteemed persons make their way and keep with the rites of the pilgrimage, in full submission, humbleness, weeping and sincerely imploring Allah. However, they are still the ranked persons in the eyes of the people.

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- (1) *It was narrated in Musnad Ahmad (3/428), in Sunnan Ibn Majah (1429), and in Sunnan Abu Dawud (862), excerpted from the Hadith narrated by 'Ab Ar-Rahman ibn Shibl who said: 'The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him prohibited to peck like a crow, to spread (the forearms) like a wild beast, and to fix a place in the mosque like a camel which gets used to a certain place'*
 - (2) *It was narrated in Sunnan Ibn Majah (1116), excerpted from the Hadith narrated by Ma'adh ibn Anas who recalled that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: 'Whoever steps over the necks of the people on Friday, he has taken a bridge to Hell'.*
 - (3) *It was narrated on the authority of Salman Al-Farisi Allah be pleased with him who mentioned that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: 'Whoever takes a bath on Friday and does it well, purifies himself and does it well, puts on his best clothes, and puts on whatever Allah decrees for him of the perfume of his family, then comes to the mosque and does not engage in idle talk or separate (pushing between) two people; he will be forgiven for (his sins) between that day and the next'. It was narrated in Sahih Al-Bukhari (910).*

Returning back to the blessed dawn time and the prayer witnessed by the angels who serve Allah during the night, though they are not charged with the responsibility of performing prayer, actually, the presence of the human beings who have been charged with the responsibility of praying is better than that of the angels because human beings get benefit from the prayer.

Therefore, as per the Noble Hadith: 'Prayer in congregation is twenty-seven times more meritorious than a prayer performed individually', ⁽¹⁾ it should be noticed that Allah *Glorified is He* has linked each of the five daily prayers to a particular time. Furthermore, He has made the movement of the sun as the indicator of prayer time. Nonetheless, this arouses the question about what is supposed to be done if the sun is hidden by cloud cover or other phenomenon and seemed to be absent. This question leads the person to the natural conclusion that it is the responsibility of the believer to create something that enables him to take exact measure of time. Certainly, the devices currently used for the measurement of time, display overwhelming ingenuity and represent a great source of ease and facilitation for people. Therefore, it is an obligation upon Muslim scholars to always aspire to introduce innovative concepts to serve faith issues because the invention of these advanced means used to serve the obligatory pillars of Islam represent a duly commitment.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمِنَ اللَّيْلِ فَتَهَجَّدْ بِهِ نَافِلَةً لَّكَ عَسَىٰ أَن يَبْعَثَكَ رَبُّكَ مَقَامًا مَّحْمُودًا ﴿٧٩﴾

And during the night wake up and pray, as an extra offering of your own, so that your Lord may raise you to a [highly] praised status [79] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 79)

In this verse, Allah commands Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to fight sleep and rise for prayer. This order is especially given to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* beyond the obligation imposed on Muslims in general. Allah's special Command to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to rise and pray at night is also reflected in His saying:

(1) It was related on the authority of Abdullah ibn 'Umar and narrated in Sahih Al-Bukhari (645) and in Sahih Muslim (650).

'You [Prophet], enfolded in your cloak [1] Stay up throughout the night, all but a small part of it, [2] half, or a little less, [3] or a little more; recite the Quran slowly and distinctly [4]' (*al-Muzzammil*: 1-4). Despite the fact that it is a special obligation imposed upon Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; yet, it is not issued in a way that denies him some flexibility in the performance of this act of worship. The important thing is to stay up for Allah *the Exalted* for even a small part of the night. The cause of this additional worship is expressed in Allah's saying: 'We shall send a momentous message down to you' (*al-Muzzammil*: 5). This suggests that night prayer and standing before Allah at that (special) time is going to grant Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the required strength and fortitude to be able to shoulder the responsibility of carrying and conveying the Divine Message to people.

In the Noble Hadith: 'Whenever anything distressed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he prayed'.⁽¹⁾ This means that when the Prophet faced an insoluble issue without having any one to alleviate his difficulties (in the worldly sense), he only resorted to Allah, the Master of the whole world to help him. As Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Night prayer makes a deeper impression and sharpens words' (*al-Muzzammil*: 6). Certainly, due to Prophet Muhammad's humble standing, imploring and engaging in intimate dialogue with Allah, when most people are deeply asleep not considering worship, he experienced Allah's mercy abundantly. Whoever imitates him and rises for prayer during this time, will also have a share in this abundant and overflowing mercy. On the other hand, those who do not rise for night prayer will have no share in such overwhelming mercy.

Thus, standing in prayer during the night grants a Muslim strength that is born out of faith and spiritual fortitude. In as much as the role of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is greater than those of other Muslims, his share of standing in night prayer also exceeds theirs. Indeed, he had to confront many difficulties that required his persistent connection with Allah, the One, the All-Sustaining to seek His help.

(1) It was narrated in *Musnad Imam Ahmad* (5/388) and in *Sunnan Abu Dawud* (1319) excerpted from the Hadith narrated by Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman Allah be pleased with him.

It is amazing and lamentable that Muslims have abandoned and completely disregarded this Prophetic Hadith. If they are distressed, they do not rush to prayer; nevertheless, they seek to offer justifications for failing to pray. There is someone who justifies that he is busy, yet being busy with some worldly affair, does not exempt him from liability for disregarding this religious obligation. He never knows that the prayer is the source of open-door blessings; it may achieve normal two-day objectives in a couple of hours. There is a marked reluctance by those people to perform the prayer; they hardly establish make-up prayers if they pray. If they are asked about their laxity on performing prayer, they justify that they do not have enough time to pray; nonetheless, if they need to use the bathroom, they would surely be able to make time for that. Even if all the world's preoccupations and concerns were bearing down on them, they should make time to pray.

As per Allah's saying: 'As an extra offering of your own...' (*al-Isra'*: 79), the phrase implies that this night prayer is an additional offering imposed especially on Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This is the spiritual excellence of the good doers mentioned by Allah in his saying: 'The righteous will be in Gardens with [flowing] springs [15] they will receive their Lord's gifts because of the good they did before [16]' (*adh-Dhariyat*: 15-16).

The person who spiritually excels good deeds is the one who performs additional deeds over his religious obligations. Hence, those who assume this status of spiritual excellence have been described by Allah *the Almighty* as: 'Sleeping only little at night [17] praying at dawn for Allah's forgiveness [18]' (*adh-Dhariyat*: 17-18). Standing in prayer during this time is not an obligation; the person may pray *Al-'Isha* and sleep until *Al-Fajr* prayer. However, if he wants to emulate and follow the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* he should spiritually excel in good deeds as much as he can.

Next, Allah *the Exalted* says: '... So that your Lord 'asa (may) raise you to a [highly] praised status.' (*al-Isra'*: 79) The beginning of this verse focused on the topic of obligation; accordingly, the conclusion provides the reward of the doer of such additional obligation. In the Arabic Quranic transcript, the word 'asa (may) indicate either 'hopefulness' (expected action that can take

place) or 'wishful thinking' (aspired wish for an impossible event). The following poetic verses illustrate the meaning of 'wishful thinking':

I wish the planets could come near

So that I would arrange them here

The poet is expressing his desire that the planets could be within his grasp so that he can arrange them in the form of poems dedicated to the encomium of his muse. It goes without saying that this is a request for the impossible.

Again, 'wishful thinking' is observed in the following poetic verses:

I wish the flush of youth could return for a single day

I would inform it of what old-age brought along its way

As for 'hopefulness', it is an aspired request for a certain action whose occurrence is possible, to take place. Under the umbrella of requests, there are many forms that can be listed. When the speaker requests something whose occurrence is impossible from another, it is considered 'wishful thinking'. Whereas, when the speaker requests something whose occurrence is possible, this is regarded as 'hopefulness'. However, when the speaker requests from someone to supply him with information to form a sensory image without demanding any action to be done, this expresses a question, such as, 'Where's Zaid?' There is a marked difference between making an actual request for something and requesting information to enable someone to form a sensory image of it.

When the speaker makes an actual request for something, he has two possibilities; whether he intends to order someone to do something or to prohibit him from performing an action. The former represents an order such as saying, 'Sit!' Conversely, the latter represents a prohibition such as saying, 'Do not sit!'

Returning to the verse under discussion, the word '*asa* (may) indicate 'hopefulness'. However, the achievement of the request only depends on the person in whom hope is placed; some people may help, whereas others may be reckless. Even though, the person could be hopeful of others' support and they are thought to be credible to achieve his requests, yet the circumstances

may not allow them to fulfil their promises because man by nature is subject to the vicissitudes of life.

On the other hand, placing hopefulness in Allah is the most assured outcome for your request. Thus, you have undoubtedly placed your hope in Allah, the Lord of Majesty, the Ever providing, the Magnificent and the Dependable, Who is never subject to the circumstances that we as Humans are. As such, the hope that is placed in Him is, undoubtedly, the request that will be realised.

Turning now to the phrase '[highly] praised status', it refers to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who is widely praised by everyone and everything from the moment of Adam's creation until the Day of Judgment. The intended meaning of '[highly] praised status' is the rank of intercession specifically granted to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. On the Day of Judgment, the creation takes their positions within the Place of Reckoning full of fear and fright of the events of that fateful day. The terror will be so overwhelming that the ardent wish of the people will simply be to leave the Place; even if they are going to the inferno of hell! Then, all nations will seek intercession of their prophets dispatched to them. Each prophet will turn them down, until they arrive at Prophet Muhammad, the Seal of the Messengers and the Master of the Prophets, who will then say, 'It is for me (intercession for all people is my granted mission), I will take it upon'.⁽¹⁾ This explains the cause that made Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* commanded us to supplicate: '*wab'athu maqaman mahmudan*

(1) In his *Tafsir* (5/4038), Al-Qurtubi mentioned: There are four different interpretations of the 'Praised Status'; the first, and most likely, conceives that it refers to the right of intercession granted to Prophet Muhammad on behalf of the people on the Day of Judgment. This opinion was conceived by Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman. The second considers that the 'It' refers to the banner of praise granted to Prophet Muhammad on the Day of Judgment. The second opinion does not contradict with the first, as the Prophet could be granted both the right of intercession and the banner of praise as well. The third opinion perceives that this is reference to the fact that Allah will seat Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on the Throne beside Himself. The fourth thesis proposes that this refers to the intercession for those in the hellfire destined to come out. This was proposed by Jabir ibn 'Abdullah.

alladhi wa'adtahu (O Allah, resurrect him to the Praised Status that you have promised)' ⁽¹⁾ There is no doubt that this prayer is for our benefit.

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقُلْ رَبِّ ادْخُلْنِيْ مُدْخَلَ صِدْقٍ وَّاَخْرِجْنِيْ مُخْرَجَ
صِدْقٍ وَّاجْعَلْ لِّيْ مِنْ لَّدُنْكَ سُلْطٰنًا نَّصِيْرًا ﴿٨٠﴾

Say, 'My Lord, make me go in truthfully, and come out truthfully, and grant me supporting authority from You'[80]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 80)

Allah's saying: '... Make me go in truthfully...' (*al-Isra'*: 80) should be viewed as a general reflection because the person, before entering truthfully, should first request permission to leave; he never enters before he exits. As such, the natural sequence of events should be: 'First, cause me to exit in a truthful and sincere manner and then cause me to enter in the same way.' This thesis is easily refuted and negated because, indeed, the purpose of leaving is to abandon something and to go into another, while the purpose of entering is to be received. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* begins with entering because it is more important. As it is said: 'Any matter, by no means, should not be left until you know how to enter into another'.

Entering into and exiting from any matter in a truthful manner should not be without a purpose. Therefore, entering somewhere truthfully means that your manner of entering is in conformity with your purpose; i.e. to enter a place, it should be done to realise a specific goal. For example, if you enter a store for a purpose, such as making a purchase, this entering is truthful. On the other hand, if you enter without a purpose or even to cause people

(1) On the authority of Jabir ibn 'Abdullah: Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Whoever says, when he hears the call to prayer: "Allahumma rabba hadhihi-da'wat it-tammah was-salat il-qaimah, ati Muahmmadan Al-wasilah wal-fadilah, wab'athu maqaman mahmudan alladhi wa'adtahu (O Allah, Lord of this perfect call and the prayer to be offered, grant Muhammad the privilege of intercession and also the eminence, and resurrect him to the Praised Status that you have promised)," will be granted my intercession on the Day of Resurrection'. It was narrated in Sahih Al-Bukhari (211) and in Musnad Ahmad (3/354)

detriment, your entrance cannot be considered truthful. In an ultimate sense, this means that your entrance and your exiting should be for the sake of Allah. This is the manner in which Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* exited from Mecca and subsequently entered into Medina. His departure and entrance were for Allah's sake; thus, they were truthful. Indeed, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not leave Mecca until his people had persecuted him and made every attempt to combat his mission so that Mecca could no longer be deemed suitable for carrying on the Prophetic Mission. Consistent with his purposeful manner of departing, he only went into Medina on account of its people's aid and support of his mission. Hence, truthfulness should comply with actual ability and objectives; it is untruthful to sell oneself short by not doing what his goal demands.

Afterwards, Allah says: '... And grant me supporting *sultan* (authority) from You' (*al-Isra'*: 80). This shows offering the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* the means of seeking Allah's aid. Indeed, Allah has dispatched His Messenger with the Message of Truth, which was in fact about to encounter heavy opposition from the people deeply involved with falsehood and moral corruption. Those people would aggressively attempt to disrupt the mission by attacking it incessantly. For this reason, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* earnestly turned to his Lord and sought his aid and support in confronting the enemies.

As previously pointed out, the word *sultan* (authority) in Allah's saying: '... Supporting *sultan* (authority)' (*al-Isra'*: 80) either designates a compelling proof or a subduing authority. This can be seen clearly within Allah's saying: 'We sent Our messengers with clear signs, the Scripture and the Balance, so that people could uphold justice...' (*al-Hadid*: 25). Thus, Allah *the Almighty* says that He sent clear signs to be the instruments of compelling evidence. Then, Allah *the Exalted* says: '... We also sent iron, with its mighty strength and many uses for mankind...' (*al-Hadid*: 25). This represents tools and instruments used for strength and deterrence of evil.

The upright person is he who restrains himself from transgressing the boundaries set by Allah and who responds to the call of the Messenger. Whereas, the wicked person is not convinced by the compelling proof and

evidence, but rather, his malicious conduct should be restrained by force. If the former is required to swear an oath by Allah, he does so faithfully; whereas, if the latter is required to give testimony, he commits perjury, conceiving that his testimony is a means of avoiding punishment. Indeed, his attitude voiced: 'Yes! I got away with this'. Similarly, old sayings conceive: 'In combating evil, punishment deters more than prohibitions revealed in the Quran.'

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقُلْ جَاءَ الْحَقُّ وَزَهَقَ الْبَاطِلُ إِنَّ الْبَاطِلَ كَانَ زَهُوقًا ﴿٨١﴾

**And say, 'The truth has come, and falsehood has passed away: falsehood is bound to pass away' [81]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 81)**

Allah *the Almighty* within this declaration has raised one of the banners of the faith that continues to fly up until the present day: 'The truth has come!' As long as Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is being commanded to announce the arrival of the truth, it can be undoubtedly assured that it is coming. Hence, Allah's order has been issued candidly. The next time that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made this declaration was in the Year of Conquest, when he entered Mecca victoriously. At the time of his triumphant arrival, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* smashed all three-hundred and sixty idols around the Ka'ba, while proclaiming, 'The truth has now come [to light], and falsehood has withered away; it will not be renewed nor will it return.'⁽¹⁾ This means that the truth has arrived and falsehood has faded away. Moreover, falsehood will never regain the strength needed for renewal or revivification; it no longer even possesses the ability to relaunch an attack.

Allah's saying: '... The truth has come, and falsehood has passed away' (*al-Isra'*: 81) seems to connote that the truth arrived on its own merits. Unmistakably, Allah has attributed the act of coming to the truth itself, as

(1) It is recorded in *Sahih Muslim* (1781), excerpted from the Hadith narrated by 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud Allah be pleased with him; and cited by *Al-Qurtubi* (5/4042) on the authority of *Al-Bukhari* and *At-Tirmidhi*.

though it possesses the ability to act according to its own will. The verse ostensibly suggests that no one brought the truth. The same can be said of the 'passing away' of falsehood, which is, by its very nature, ill-fated, decadent, waning, weak, degenerate, and short-lived.

It is remarkable that the truth, when arrived, ushered in by Messenger Muhammad on the Conquest of Mecca, benefited everyone; even the disbelievers. On that day, an incident showing the loftiness of the Islamic faith took place. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called upon the people of Mecca, who had erstwhile displayed rank stubbornness and arrogance and who had driven him away from the most beloved place to him; Mecca. However, on that day, the tables had turned and the Prophet then had the upper hand. They came before him and he said: 'What do you think I am going to do with you?' 'Good! You are a noble fellow and you are the son of one of our noblest fellows' they hopefully responded. He told them: 'Go! All of you are free to go!'⁽¹⁾

Therefore, it is obvious that the truth has nothing to do with suppressing people; contrariwise, its arrival represents their relief and elevation. Among the manifestations of truth that casts its shadow over the Meccan populace at the Conquest, there is another incident that took place: One of the enemies of Islam entered the sanctuary of the *Ka'ba* and headed towards Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the intention of harming him.

(1) *It is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra, 'Indeed, Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him prevailed upon Mecca with the intention of conquering it and Allah made his intention realised—for your good. Then, he entered upon the leaders of Quraysh, the idolaters who were in control of the Ka'ba at that time. They were assured that they would be executed. Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him then circumambulated the Ka'ba and performed two units of prayer and went to the Holy House itself. Once there, he grabbed the handle of the door and asked, "well, what have you to say for yourselves now, what do you think?" They said, "you are regarded as a man of magnanimity among us and you are the son of a gentle, forbearing man". They repeated this three times. Then, Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him responded to them: "I say to you as Yusuf (Joseph) peace be upon him said: 'But he said, "You will hear no reproaches today. May Allah forgive you: He is the Most Merciful of the merciful"' (Yusuf: 92). Abu Hurayra continued, 'they rose from that sitting as though were rising from the graves. In time, they entered Islam.' It was narrated in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa of Al-Bayhaqi (5/58).*

However, once he placed his hand on the Messenger, he completely changed. He said, 'I swear by Allah, when I prevailed upon him (with the intention of harming him), there was nothing more disliked to me in the world than him. Yet, as I placed my hand on him, I swear by Allah, there became nothing in the world more beloved to me than him.'⁽¹⁾ This illustrates the arrival of the truth and the passing away of falsehood.

In Allah's saying: '... Falsehood is bound to pass away' (*al-Isra'*: 81), the phrase 'bound to pass away' has the pattern of intensification. The meaning indicates that falsehood is intrinsically fading away and dissipating. Strangely enough, falsehood itself is used as one of the Divine forces. But for the bitterness of the falsehood, the people would not have been desirous of the truth. Thus, with the sting of falsehood's bite, they do recognize the sweetness of the truth.

Allah *the Almighty* has illustrated an example for truth and falsehood, as He says: 'He sends water from the sky those 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 Allah illustrates truth and falsehood— the froth disappears, but what is of benefit to man stays behind— this is how Allah makes illustrations' (*ar-Ra'd*: 17). Allah *Glorified is He* makes use of a very effective analogy to explain the nature of truth and falsehood. He resembles them to the natural phenomenon accompanying the rainwater on the mountaintops. As the rainwater descends onto the mountaintops and subsequently flows into the valleys between the mountains, as it carries sediments of mixed stones,

(1) *Ibn Hisham narrated in his Sira of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him (4/37): Faddala ibn 'Umayr ibn Al-Maluh Al-Laythi wanted to assassinate the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him while he was circumambulating the House in the year of the Conquest of Mecca. So when he drew near to him, the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Is that Faddala?' He responded, 'Yes, I am, O Messenger of Allah.' The Prophet then asked, 'What are you talking to yourself about?' 'Uh, nothing at all, I was just remembering Allah', he forced out. At this, the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him laughed and then said 'seek the forgiveness of Allah!' He then placed his hand on Faddala's chest and he experienced an unusual sense of calmness. Faddala went on recount: 'I swear by Allah, by the time he had lifted his hand from my chest, there was nothing in Allah's creation more beloved to me than him*

sand, and straw. This results in the formation of the top layer of froth that floats over the water's surface. Needless to say, this froth is not beneficial to the people. As soon as the wind blows, this froth is taken aside to leave water pure, useful, and untainted. Within the analogy, this water represents the truth as it benefits people; whereas, the froth is representative of falsehood as it is useless.

Additionally, there are other examples that Allah *the Almighty* illustrates to enable people to recognise this analogy; such as those jobs of the blacksmith or the goldsmith. Indeed, the latter heats gold under fire in order to remove whatever dross is attached to the pure precious metal.

Next, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَنَزَّلْنَا مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ مَا هُوَ شِفَاءٌ وَرَحْمَةٌ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَلَا يَزِيدُ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا خَسَارًا ﴿٨٢﴾

We send down the Quran as healing and mercy to those who believe; as for those who disbelieve, it only increases their loss [82] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 82)

The verse cites two models of people receiving the Quran: the first, when the believer deals with the Quran; it represents a healing and a mercy. However, when the wrongdoer receives the Quran, it represents a source of loss. The Quran clarifies that the wrongdoing is the cause of failure to benefit from it. Undoubtedly, the Quran is essentially the source of goodness; rather than the source of loss.

Previously, we clarified that two distinguishable persons may be subjected to the same action, but their subsequent reaction varies from one to another. In other words, when pure cold water is drunk by someone in good health, he finds its taste agreeable and sweet; however, the same water can be drunk by an ill person, who finds its taste bitter and stale. In both cases, the water is the same, but the one with whom the water is 'interacting' is different. In this vein, if someone in good health eats butterfat, it benefits him; for it increases his activeness and strength. On the other hand, if another sick person eats butterfat, it increases the severity of his sickness and aggravates his illness.

Some of these meanings were, beforehand, elucidated in the story of the conversion of Al-Faruq Umar *Allah be pleased with him* to the Islam. Inflexibly,

when he received the Quran in a spirit of disbelief and stubbornness, he felt aversion and abhorrence towards it. Yet, when he received the Quran in a spirit of tenderness, gentleness, and mercy towards his sister whose tooth had been fractured by him, he was impressed and believed in it.

Fundamentally, being good-natured or ill natured has an impact on the person receiving and interacting with the Quran. This issue is remarkably similar to optimism and pessimism; for example, if there is a half-filled cup of water, the optimist directs his attention to the half-filled part of the cup while the pessimist will see the other empty half. The former is positively optimistic with the half-filled cup; whereas, the latter is negatively pessimistic that the other half is empty! Both of them are considered correct; it is only their dispositions that differ.

The issue of receiving the Quran has been tackled in Allah's saying: 'When a chapter is revealed, some [hypocrites] say, "Have any of you been strengthened in faith by it?" It certainly does strengthen the faith of those who believe and they rejoice [124] but, as for the perverse at heart, each new chapter adds further to their perversity. They die disbelieving [125]' (*at-Tawba*: 124-125). These verses discuss that the Quran revealed is unchangeably the same; yet, it is only the disposition of the person receiving the Quran which varies. The believer receives it with his sound faculties, so it increases his belief; however, the disbeliever receives it with corrupted faculties, so it increases his disbelief. In conclusion, the process of receiving facts is only distorted by corrupted faculties.

As the following saying goes, 'In searching for the truth, do not promote any falsehood within yourself. You should first disestablish the harboured falsehood, so that you can soundly compare different matters to reach the best'.

Furthermore, there is another example that tackle the same issue in Allah's saying: 'Some of these people listen to you [Prophet], but, once they leave your presence, they sneer at those who have been given knowledge, saying, "What was that he just said?" These are the ones whose hearts Allah has sealed, those who follow their own desires [16] Allah has increased the guidance of those who follow the right path, and given them their awareness [of Him] [17]' (*Muhammad*: 16-17). The saying, '... What was that he just

said?' (*Muhammad*: 16) is evidence that they did not really pay attention or actually care about the Quran.

Moreover, there is a third example tackling the same matter in Allah's saying: 'If We had made it a foreign Quran, they would have said, "If only its verses were clear! What? Is it foreign speech to an Arab?" Say, "It is guidance and healing for those who have faith, but the ears of the disbelievers are heavy, they are blind to it..."' (*Fussilat*: 44).

For more clarification, another compelling example from everyday life is the television transmission. Some people watch and enjoy a television program in their home because they are able to pick up a clear signal; whereas, their friend might complain of the bad connection and the fuzziness of the picture. They advise him to solve the problem in his receiver. Similarly, the key factor to properly receive the verses of Allah is to adjust the 'receiver' correctly (to have sound faculties).

Therefore, Allah's saying: 'We send down the Quran as healing and mercy to those who believe...' (*al-Isra'*: 82) depends upon the person's good-natured, good receipt of the Quran and sound understanding of Allah's Messages.

Turning to the word 'healing', it means treating a present illness to bring about recovery. As for the word 'mercy', it refers to taking the precautionary measures necessary to prevent the reoccurrence of an illness of which once you have been cured. Thus, 'mercy' is used for protection and 'healing' for treatment.

However, is the Quran limited to be a cure (in a metaphorical sense) for the spiritual diseases of the heart and the harmful effects of the psyche? Does it free the Muslim heart from vexation, confusion, worry, envy, rage and other spiritual maladies? Is it a treatment for physical illnesses as well? It is established that the meaning of 'the Quran is a cure', is as broad as the meaning of the word treatment can sustain. This means that it is used for the treatment of both physical and spiritual diseases. This is ascertained by the Hadith narrated on the authority of Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri *Allah be pleased with him* that he set out at the head of a caravan who eventually passed by a people and asked them for food but were refused hospitality. As fate would have it, the leader of those people was bitten by a poisonous animal and his people asked for anyone to treat him.

When they requested from the people of the caravan to treat him, they responded, 'We can only treat him in exchange for some sheep as compensation.' They bargained them because of their stinginess and failure to honour them as visitors. Their deed came in accordance with Allah's saying: '... But if you had wished you could have taken payment for doing that' (*al-Kahf*: 77).

Once they had agreed upon food compensation in reward for treating the leader, they recited the chapter *al-Fatiha* over him, and he was cured. Taking their reward, they ate some of the food but waited for eating the compensated sheep until they returned to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. As they returned, they asked the Messenger concerning the permissibility of taking their reward. He said: 'Who informed you of the healing properties of the Quran? What you have experienced is named *Ruqyah* (reading the Quran over a sick person to treat him so that he may be healed, by the permission of Allah). Divide the sheep up and give me a share as well'.⁽¹⁾

Accordingly, treating physical illness with the Quran is not something weird, but rather, it has precedence in the Prophetic Hadith. Indeed, The Quran is the saying of Allah, the Master of all things, who subdues His creation, simply, by saying the word 'Be' to do whatever He wills. The possibility of the curative effect of Allah's Words on the ill person is not at all farfetched.

On one occasion, a challenger to the concept that the Quran can be a physical cure, engaged in a debate with a scholar upholding the view the opponent questioned the scholar, 'How can a sick person be cured by the use of mere words? This is implausible!' The scholar responded, 'Shut up, you idiot!' The man flushed with anger and was about to leave the place. The scholar said, 'Look! What a simple word that has affected you! What about the effect of sacred Words uttered by Allah *the Almighty*?' Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...As for those who disbelieve, it only increases their loss' (*al-Isra'*: 82). Due to their wrong-deeds as well as corrupt and contradicting predisposition in receiving the heavenly graces; they did not benefit from the Quran and, thus, failed to avail themselves of Allah's Mercy.

(1) It is narrated in *Musnad Ahmad* (3/44) and in *Sahih Al-Bukhari* (5736), excerpted from the Hadith narrated on the authority of Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri Allah be pleased with him.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذَا أَنْعَمْنَا عَلَى الْإِنْسَانِ أَعْرَضَ وَنَأَى بِجَانِبِهِ وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ الشَّرُّ كَانَ يَئُوسًا

**When We favour man he turns arrogantly to one side,
but when harm touches him, he falls into despair [83]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 83)**

Allah *the Exalted* gives the human being an accurate depiction of his own essence so that he can be enough fortified by faith if inflicted with an illness. This is similar to how the physician prescribes a vaccination or immunization shots to prevent the occurrence of a virus. Even though, this reflects the human nature and the overwhelming traits which dictate his conduct; yet, he should lessen the adverse effects of this nature. Spelled out plainly, the verse indicates the human being's tendency to turn away arrogantly from Allah's Path as he receives Allah's bounty.

To further elucidate this issue, there is the example of the father who gives his son a monthly allowance; surely, to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection. In this case, the son only pays attention to the father on the beginning of every month; no doubt, his goal is simply to get the allowance that he is accustomed to, while he disregards him throughout the whole month. The scenario would not be the same if the son received his allowance daily; he would pay attention to the father each day to remind him of his allowance. In all cases, why does the son disregard and turn away from his father after having his allowance? Undoubtedly, the father gives his son the freedom to deem himself independent throughout the month. If the son were good and devoted, he would never overlook the favour of his father, but he would cherish him. The case of the father and the son is a small-scale simulation to the utmost example of Allah *the Almighty*.

This verse means that the wrongdoer turns away from remembering Allah and abandons His Way. There are some people who turn away from the remembrance of Allah but continue to follow His Way. If they would only follow the Way of Allah and also keep on remembering Him, there would be no way to ever neglect the Divine Giver of blessing.

If the person is preoccupied by the gifted blessing and turns away from Allah, Who endows this blessing, it is almost as if he considers Allah—the Divine Giver of blessing—as dispensable. Thus, Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘But man exceeds all bounds [6] when he thinks he is self-sufficient [7]’ (*al-‘Alaq*: 6-7). This self-sufficiency is not an innate feature of the human being; contrariwise, it is acquired. This means that he could cease this transgression of self-sufficiency one day and turn again to beseech Allah, the Endower of the blessing, for a Divine grant. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘[Prophet], all will return to your Lord’ (*al-‘Alaq*: 8).

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* mentions another disgraceful human defect: ‘... But when harm touches him, he falls into despair’ (*al-Isra'*: 83). When the human being is faced by unfavourable circumstances or is even slightly harmed, he falls into despair in Allah’s Mercy. In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* is directly advising His creature who falls into despair that even if he felt tightly constrained by the distresses of life, there is no cause to give in to hopelessness and desolation. Indeed, he, as a believer, does not live with a myopic focus on the means, but rather, he should be broad-minded to pay attention to satisfy Allah *the Almighty* Who controls the means. As long as he is able to enjoy the ‘good graces’ of Allah, Who is in control of the means, so he should not fall into despair or hopelessness

This explains the saying, ‘As long as Allah is the Lord, do not be stressed’. It might be acceptable for a person to soak in despair if he does not have a Lord overseeing his affair; otherwise, there is no reason to be hopeless. The son relying on his father does not worry about worldly concerns; but rather, he feels stress-free as his father takes care of his needs. In the light of that example, what about people who rely on their Lord to look after their interests and to take care of their needs? As long as they have a Lord to turn to and to call on him at any time, they should not be desperate or over-stressed.

As Allah *the Almighty* directs our attention to this matter, He teaches us not to feel sorrow if we perform a good deed or a favour to someone who rejects or refuses to admit it. He teaches us not to be dismayed, as long as they do the same in respect to Allah, the Lord of all creation. Indeed, Allah incessantly bestows favours upon them; whereas, they, in return, disregard Him and deny His favours.

When Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* requested from Allah to prevent people from casting aspersion on him, Allah told him that He does not do this even in respect to Himself. As they fabricate many unbefitting concepts on Allah, openly profess their disbelief in Him and denounce His Power in originating creation or granting blessings. So no one should be angered by slanders or abuses casted on him by the disbelievers.

Nonetheless, the human being can be easily given to despair and melancholy because, while experiencing blessing, he disregards and turns away from Allah. Consequently, he denies his need to the Lord to resort to in the time of distresses. Therefore, he who turns away from Allah in the beginning will be driven to despair in the end. Yet, Allah *the Exalted* responds to those who call on Him and seek refuge in Him at times of adversity, even the disbelievers: 'When you get into distress at sea, those you pray to besides Him desert you...' (*al-Isra'*: 67).

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ كُلٌّ يَعْمَلُ عَلَى شَاكِلَتِهِ ۚ فَرَبُّكُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ هُوَ أَهْدَىٰ سَبِيلًا ﴿٨٤﴾

**Say, 'Everyone does things their own way, but your Lord is fully aware of who follows the best-guided path' [84]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 84)**

Each individual in this life goes on his particular path with his own disposition. Additionally, people are at variance concerning their behavioural tendencies: the first type is positively predisposed to faith, the second is in a continuous conflict sometimes predisposed towards faith while other times towards disobedience, whereas the third is negatively susceptible to disbelief. As such, people are not the same; thus, they cannot be forced to be of the same disposition.

As long as the situation conforms to the description above, everyone should act according to his unique and particular disposition. Thus, if an ill-natured person treats others rudely, they should not treat him the same in return. Their responsibility is to act in accordance with their own disposition and standard of behaviour; they should respond in a way that expresses their good standard.

As the saying goes: 'There is no better way to respond to he who disobeys Allah through misbehaving yourself than to obey Allah through gracefully behaving in regard to him' in this manner, the social balance within the community is established and the causes of inconsistencies are resolved.

In this verse, '*Rabb* (Lord)' refers to Allah, Who is responsible for edification and who undoubtedly knows the idiosyncrasies, secrets and other traits of His follower. As Allah *the Exalted* says: 'How could He Who created not know His own creation, when He is the Most Subtle, the All Aware?' (*al-Mulk*: 14)

Subsequently, Allah *the Exalted* says:⁽¹⁾

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الرُّوحِ قُلِ الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿٨٥﴾

[Prophet], they ask you about the Spirit. Say, 'The Spirit is part of my Lord's domain. You have only been given a little knowledge' [85] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 85)

The phrase 'they ask you' has been used throughout the Quran conveying several meanings. If the phrase inquires about something beneficial, which if it remained unknown would expose the person to harm, the Quran provides

(1) *The reason of the revelation of this verse: It was narrated on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud: {While I was walking in the company of the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him in one of the fields of Medina, the Prophet was leaning on a date palm leaf-stalk. We passed by a group of Jews. Some of them said to the others, 'Ask him about the spirit.' The others said, 'Do not ask him, lest he would say something that you hate.' Some of them said, 'We will ask him.' So a man from among them stood up and said, 'O Abul Qasim! What is the spirit?' The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him kept quiet and I knew that he was being Divinely inspired. Allah revealed to him: '[Prophet], they ask you about the Spirit. Say, "The Spirit is part of my Lord's domain. You have only been given a little knowledge".' (al-Isra': 85)}*

This was narrated in Sahih Al-Bukhari (4721) and also in Sahih Muslim (2794). It is mentioned in Tafsir Ibn Kathir (60/3): This context, apparently, gives clear indication that this verse was revealed during the Medinan phase of the prophetic mission. Indeed, it was revealed after the Jews questioned him about that in Medina. In spite of this, the chapter is entirely deemed Meccan (revealed during the Meccan phase of the Prophetic mission). This aroused a conclusion that this chapter was revealed to him at Medina a second time just as it had been revealed at Mecca beforehand. Or perhaps he was given revelation (while in Mecca) that he would respond to their queries with this verse that would be revealed to him later on.

the listeners with answers to their queries. This is illustrated in Allah's saying: 'They ask you [Prophet] about menstruation. Say, "Menstruation is a painful condition, so keep away from women during it..."' (*al-Baqara*: 222). Moreover, it is also illustrated in Allah's verse: 'They ask you [Prophet] what they should give. Say, "Whatever you give should be for parents, close relatives, orphans, the needy and travellers. Allah is well aware of whatever good you do".' (*al-Baqara*: 215) On the other hand, if there is an enquiry about something un-influential, which if it remained unknown would not expose the person to harm; the Quran redirects their attention to other beneficial matters. A compelling example of this type is illustrated as they asked about the phases of the moon; how does the new moon appear small at first, and then incrementally grow in size until it becomes a full-moon, after which, it decreases again until it returns to its original state?

Engaging the Arabs, at the time of the revelation of the Quran, in these natural phenomena which have not been discovered yet, is a useless matter. Furthermore, a full explanation of this exhaustive scientific reasoning of the various lunar phases would surpass their level of perception at that time. Additionally, this knowledge was then inadequate to help in grasping the Divine Law. As well as, its inexplicable mysteriousness would not expose the person to any harm. However, if the Quran had explained in details that there are various phases of the moon and that its rotation in a specific orbit between the earth and the sun causes the alteration of day and night, to people unaware of scientific changes, they would have accused the Quran with spreading baseless superstitions and they would have perhaps abandoned this religion at all.

However, Allah turned their attention to an aspect concerning crescent moons that had to do with the benefit they got from those crescents: 'They ask you [Prophet] about crescent moons. Say, "They show the times appointed for people, and for the pilgrimage"' (*al-Baqara*: 189).

Sometimes, Prophet Muhammad was given questions for the sole purpose of testing his truthfulness. An instance of this took place when the Jews of Mecca incited the polytheists to ask Prophet Muhammad about the spirit. The Jews were well aware that no mortal possessed knowledge about it, but they only meant to plot against the Prophet. They thought that maybe he would be

tempted to say anything about the spirit by way of reply, which they knew beforehand would be wrong as no one could tell the truth about the nature of the spirit. They wanted him to fall in that trap to use his necessarily false answer to the question against him and dissuade people from accepting the religion he called for.⁽¹⁾ It was a malicious scheme they plotted to prove he was a liar and not a Messenger of Allah. Indeed, in most cases, people are tempted to appear knowledgeable, especially before adversaries. No one would like to admit that he has no answer to a question given by his enemy. It was this instinct that the Jews depended on. They thought the Messenger would never allow himself to be demeaned before his opponents and would attempt to furnish an answer- a wrong one- to their question.

Nevertheless, Allah rendered their attempt futile. He revealed to His Messenger an answer they had never expected: '[Prophet], they ask you about the spirit. Say, "The Spirit is part of my Lord's domain. You have only been given a little knowledge."' (al-Isra': 85). Hearing this truthful answer, many of the people of the Scripture embraced Islam, for this answer was consistent with what they had learned from their Scriptures about the nature of the spirit and that it is from Allah and none but Him knows its secret.

It is worthy of notice that the word *ruh* (spirit) has been used in several contexts with different meanings. One of them is: the force that breathes life into the body so long as it inhabits it, as in the following verse: 'When I have fashioned him and breathed My *ruh* (spirit) into him, bow down before him' (al-Hijr: 29). If this spirit is taken out of the body, it becomes a lifeless corpse. This is death that Allah describes in His words: 'When the soul of a dying man comes up to his throat' (al-Waqi'a: 83).

In other verses of the Quran, the word *ruh* is used to refer to the Angel Jibril (Gabriel) entrusted with delivering the Divine Revelation, as Allah says: 'The Trustworthy *ruh* brought it down' (ash-Shu'ara': 193). In other contexts,

(1) Imam Ahmad Narrated in his Musnad (4/60) on the authority of Ibn Abbas, 'The polytheists of Quraysh said to the Jews, "Tell us something to ask that man [Prophet Muhammad] about." The Jews told them, "Ask him about the spirit.' They did, and on that occasion, Allah revealed this verse: '[Prophet], they ask you about the spirit. Say, "The Spirit is part of my Lord's domain. You have only been given a little knowledge."' (al-Isra': 85).

the word *ruh* is used to refer to Divine Revelation, as Allah says: 'So We have revealed a *ruh* to you [Prophet] by Our command...' (*ash-Shura*: 52).

The word *ruh* is sometimes also used to convey 'empowerment', as in this verse: '...These are the people in whose hearts Allah has inscribed faith, and whom He has strengthened with His *Ruh*...' (*al-Mujadala*: 22). The word *ruh* is also used to refer to 'Isa (Jesus) the son of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon them*: '...The Messiah, 'Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), was nothing more than a Messenger of Allah, His word, directed to Mary, a *ruh* from Him...' (*an-Nisa*: 171).

Now the question is: what is the common thread that ties these several meanings together? Some have put it that the spirit is the secret that gives life to the body and that Divine Revelation is the secret that gives life to the heart and soul by ingraining faith in them, hence the similarity and the use of *ruh* to describe both. The spirit gives one the temporary life of this world whereas faith is the way to the eternal life of the Hereafter. The former is a *ruh* in the sense that it gives force to the mortal body to perform its mission in this life, and the latter is also a *ruh*- and is even more deserving of this name- for it is the force that causes one's life to extend without end and enjoy eternal bliss as promised by our Lord.

Allah means to alert us to the truth. This life is but a journey, no matter how long it lasts. We exist in this world, demonstrate power and ability through our actions and achievements so long as the spirit that inhabits our bodies. However, all this is temporary. The real life is yet to come. It is the life when our deeds culminate in the final station each will be deservedly placed in, there to remain forever: '... The true life is in the Hereafter, if only they knew' (*al-'Ankabut*: 64). The *ruh* (spirit) that animates your body in the life of this world is inevitably exposed to the possibility of being taken from you at any moment, ever since you are a foetus in the womb of your mother until you grow old. On the other hand, the *ruh* that leads you to blissful eternity in the Hereafter is eternal too. It is the guidance sent down to us from our Lord to lead us along His Straight Path. This *ruh* is stronger and more permanent, never to be visited by death.

Now it may be easy to perceive why the word *ruh* is used to refer to the Quran and the angel who was commissioned with the responsibility of

delivering it. They both have contributed to guiding the *ruh*, which is the spirit, to eternity in Paradise, to the life attained by committing oneself to the Ordinance of the Creator.

So Allah says: ‘... Say, “The Spirit is part of my Lord’s domain...”’ (*al-Isra'*: 85). It is a matter that none but Allah possesses knowledge of. No one can explore its nature or know its secrets. Is it an essence which enters the body and causes it to have life and the absence of which causes death. Perhaps it is only the effect of the Creator’s command to life ‘Be’: when He says to it ‘Be’, it exists, and when He commands it to die, it dies. After answering the question about *ruh* (the spirit), Allah concludes the verse by saying: ‘... You have only been given a little knowledge.’” (*al-Isra'*: 85) No one can ever grasp the reality of the spirit. Has the human mind not already encompassed knowledge of everything so it only remains for it to mingle with the secrets of the spirit? At one time, a man criticized one of the adherents of Sufism. The latter asked him, ‘Have you attained a comprehensive understanding of everything in creation?’ ‘No,’ the man replied. The Sufi then said, ‘Well, I am one of those things that you do not understand!’

As we pointed out before, when Allah presents to us a certain fact, He does so from an angle that our limited minds can grasp. Were He to unveil to us the secrets of everything, they would sure be above our ability to comprehend. We have already seen an example of this wisdom in His answer to the question about crescent moons. He says: ‘... They show the times appointed for people, and for the pilgrimage.’ (*al-Baqara*: 189) This is the benefit of crescent moons and this is what matters to us. As for the development of the moon’s phases, this is a matter that ignorance of would cause no harm. Benefitting from something is not dependent on complete understanding of its reality or possessing thorough knowledge of it. An illiterate villager can use a television and a VCR even though he does not know how these machines work or the process by which they function. Allah draws our attention to this issue when He says: ‘Do not follow blindly what you do not know to be true...’ (*al-Isra'*: 36). We should not interfere with things we have no knowledge of. The mental powers Allah has endowed us with are too precious to be wasted on things that knowledge of would do no real good just as ignorance

of would do no harm. What benefit do we gain from knowing the secrets of the *ruh* (spirit)? What harm can be done if we remain ignorant of it? Knowledge is worth it when it helps us gain benefits and avoid harms.

When Allah says: '...You have only been given a little knowledge.' (*al-Isra'*: 85), this was not meant to just address Prophet Muhammad's contemporaries who asked about the *ruh* (spirit). This verse was revealed over fourteen-hundred years ago. However, it is meant to address all people until the advent of Judgment Day. It encompasses all human endeavours to attain knowledge until the end of time. It is a timeless message to all humankind not to overstep their limits, for if they discover a secret of Allah's creation, there remains countless secrets undiscovered and undiscoverable.

Allah has already foretold that He would guide us to find out some of the wonders of His creation: 'We shall show them Our signs in every region of the earth and in themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth...' (*Fussilat*: 53). Indeed, breakthroughs about the vast universe and the human being are made every day. In astronomy, physics, and all sciences, countless discoveries have been made, all equally amazing and equally expressive of the Majesty of Him Who has created everything. Nevertheless, does this mean that we know everything? The aforementioned verse implies that the process of discovering the vast creation of Allah will be ongoing by His will until the Final Hour, and really much will still remain unknown to us!

Aspirations of the human mind throughout history have proved to be so high. The products of these aspirations show that scientific advancement proceeds in large leaps. In the past, progress was measured by centuries. Now, hardly a single day passes without a new, unprecedented invention coming to light. A machine would be manufactured only to remain on the shelves because newer models have been released before the older ones could be sold! It is worthy of underlining, however, that human discoveries and inventions only contribute to increasing welfare. Products of this creative human effort all pertain to life's luxuries, for the basic needs of life have already been there without any interference on the part of humankind. Allah has already provided the world with all the essential requirements of life even before man was brought to existence. People have always lived before they knew electricity. Invention of

the latter only added to their welfare. People used to drink in earthen jugs and now they use crystal glasses. Human inventions have been an increase in luxury, but the basic needs of life have always been there. Allah has secured them even before humankind were brought to the earth.

Human intellectual prowess has wonderfully blossomed. Scientific advancement has reached such unsurpassed levels that people almost deem themselves as sovereigns over the entire creation, as if nothing in existence can overcome their irresistible control. However, all this will come to an end: ‘... But when the earth has taken on its finest appearance, and adorns itself, and its people think they have power over it, then the fate We commanded comes to it, by night or by day, and We reduce it to stubble, as if it had not flourished just the day before...’ (*Yunus*: 24). Allah calls His servants to obey Him so when they return to Him, after they have explored some of the secrets of His creation and enjoyed some of His bounties, they will enjoy ultimate bounty and eternal joy in the Hereafter. All the dazzling luxury of this life is only what man has made for himself. Now then about what that which Allah has prepared for man in the Hereafter? If life’s finery can be so wonderful, how marvellous can Allah’s reward be?

Whatever we see of the enjoyments of this life in the hands of some should not be a cause for envying them or bearing them any grudge. Rather, they are manifestations of our Lord’s Majesty and Bounty that should make us long for what He has prepared for the righteous in the Hereafter. If what He gives to His servants- believers or not- in this life is so beautiful, we should long then to have what He has prepared for His believing servants to enjoy eternally.

Whatever developments and advancements humankind has been able to produce are originally based on the elements and resources Allah has created. Even the mind that thinks, the will, and the hands that work are all creations of Allah *Glorified is He*. The role of the human being then is confined to using his mind and creativity to employ the resources Allah has created. No matter what height these developments reach, they are no competition to what waits in Paradise, where the believers will have their wishes come true just as these wishes cross their minds!

Allah says in the following verse:

وَلَئِنْ شِئْنَا لَنَذْهَبَنَّ بِالَّذِي أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ ثُمَّ لَا يَجِدُ لَكَ بِهِ عَلَيْنَا وَكِيلًا ﴿٨٦﴾

If We pleased, We could take away what We have revealed to you – then you would find no one to plead for you against Us [86] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 86)

By this verse, Allah means to discipline the disbelievers. Meanwhile, He means to protect His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* from their blame and alleviate some of his burden. The verse declares he was only delivering the Message of Allah and was never a fabricator who contrived that message and claimed it was revealed to him by Allah. Had Allah so willed, He could have taken back what He had revealed to him. He could have blotted out what His Messenger received and what the Companions learnt and recorded.

Some may ask: would Allah have rescinded the Truth He had revealed, after He had made it known to people through His Messenger? The verses use the second conditional, which indicates impossibility, for Allah would not hide the Truth or rescind His revelations. The verse is meant to emphasize that Allah is Capable of doing that if He wanted it. The purpose of this declaration is to clear Prophet Muhammad from any accusation against his truthfulness. He did not invent that Message, but Allah chose him to be His Messenger to humankind.

Some misunderstand the meaning and purpose of this verse: ‘whether Allah relents towards them or punishes them is not for you [Prophet] to decide...’ (*Al-Imran*: 128). They wrongly believe it implies reproach or censure of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, the meaning of the verse has nothing to do with anything even remotely similar to that. By this verse, Allah only means to tell the people of Prophet Muhammad and everyone addressed by this Message that the Prophet was only a servant of Allah in Whose Hand is everything. Prophet Muhammad did not do or say anything, pertaining to his mission, of his own accord, but was only implementing the commands of Allah Who is the One Who decrees everything. It was also to protect Prophet Muhammad from the anger of his disbelieving people. It is like a master who says in defence of his servant, ‘Do not blame or harm him;

I am the one who commanded him to do whatever he has done.' This is only an illustrating example, for Allah is far elevated above all comparison.

Now, why must we regard it as farfetched that the Creator- with all His Power- could blot out that which He revealed to His Messenger after it had been memorized? Have we not seen that a person can lose his memory and hardly remember anything about his life? Just as Allah may cause someone to lose his memory, He could well rescind that which He had revealed to His Messenger.

Allah concludes the verse by saying: '... then you would find no one to plead for you against Us' (*al-Isra'*: 86). If Allah were to take back what He had revealed to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* no one could plead with Allah for the revelation to be returned to the Prophet again.

This would have been the case:

إِلَّا رَحْمَةً مِّن رَّبِّكَ إِنَّ فَضْلَهُ كَانَ عَلَيْكَ كَبِيرًا ﴿٨٧﴾

**If it were not for your Lord's mercy: His favour to you
has been truly great [87] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 87)**

This is a message to reassure Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that Allah is his only Protector, so let him never grieve, for Allah's favour upon him is abundant. In the next verse, Allah poses a challenge to everyone addressed by the Message:

قُلْ لِّئِنِ اجْتَمَعَتِ الْإِنسُ وَالْجِنُّ عَلَىٰ أَن يَأْتُوا بِمِثْلِ هَٰذَا
الْقُرْآنِ لَا يَأْتُونَ بِمِثْلِهِ وَلَوْ كَانَ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ ظَهِيرًا ﴿٨٨﴾

**Say, 'Even if all mankind and jinn came together to produce
something like this Quran, they could not produce anything
like it, however much they helped each other' [88]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 88)**

As for the command 'Say', it does not mean this is a dialogue between Allah and His Messenger. Quite the reverse, it is a command to Prophet Muhammad to announce this challenge to all mortals, all humankind and jinn. These two distinct kinds are those Allah has chosen from among His creatures

to assume the onus of moral responsibility on account of the freewill He has given them. Allah has sent Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to mankind and jinn alike. The latter, too, are addressed by the Glorious Quran, as Allah says: ‘Say [Prophet], “It has been revealed to me that a group of jinn once listened in and said, “We have heard a wondrous Quran, that gives guidance to the right path, and we have come to believe it”’ (*al-Jinn*: 1-2). A challenge is something you ask of a protester that you know he would be unable of. However, the challenge has to be of the field that the protester excels in. Otherwise, the challenge would be devoid of any logic. It would be implausible to challenge someone about a thing of which they have no knowledge. It would not make any sense to challenge a normal person with no prior weightlifting experience to a contest. A real challenge would be posed to a well-known weightlifting champion. This explains why all of the miracles that were given to the Messengers of Allah were related to fields in which their respective peoples displayed particular excellence. This was the case so that each miracle could serve as a challenge to those addressed by the message. None of the previous nations would have room to complain that the challenge was in a field they knew nothing about. None could have claimed that, had the challenge been in a field of which they had knowledge, they would have defeated the Messenger. The miracle of Prophet Musa (Moses)-the staff that turned into a snake and his hand that shone when he brought it out of his pocket- were related to a field in which his contemporaries excelled: magic and sorcery. Had that been mere magic, they would have defeated it, but it was not any sort of magic, rather, it was a miracle from Allah. The miracles of Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) were reviving the dead, restoring hearing to the deaf, and curing the leprous. It was so because his people excelled at medicine. The miracle of Prophet Muhammad was the unique, unmatched eloquence he was given- manifested in the Glorious Quran- since Arabs were truly masterful in the language of Arabic.

The disbelievers of Mecca requested particular signs to be sent down to them so they would believe in the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad. However, it was for Allah only to decide which miracles and signs to send to His servants. He knew *the Exalted* what was most appropriate in each context to serve as a miracle to prove the truthfulness of His Messenger. Had the

adversaries of Prophet Muhammad asked him to bring them signs and miracles that were related to fields they knew next to nothing of. Allah would not have challenged them- by sending down the miracles they wanted- in fields in which they possess no particular genius. Rather, He revealed the Quran and made it the principle miracle that affirms the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for it challenged them in their field of excellence. What really distinguishes the Quran from all the previous miracles of the Prophets is that it will last to impress every generation of humankind until the end of time. Other miracles- that were relevant to physical phenomena- were also given to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for his contemporaries to see. These were miracles directly addressed to his contemporaries to further support him before his opponents. We believe in them for news of them were narrated to us by the trustworthy transmitters of the Message- who received it directly from the Prophet and delivered it to us generation after another. The purpose of those various miracles was to establish faith in the hearts of those who witnessed them. Among them was the water that gushed forth under the hands of Prophet Muhammad, the tree branch that leaned towards his direction, and the animal that spoke to him. Unlike the Quran, the objective of these miracles was to give assurance of the Prophet's truthfulness to those who witnessed them. The Glorious Quran, however, is addressed to everyone who has lived on earth, ever since the time of Prophet Muhammad until the Day of Judgement.

What really distinguishes the Quran from the previous Books and miracles is that it is both the Book and the miracle. It is the divine revelation that offers guidance and the perfect way of life and is meanwhile a miracle that stuns with its magnificence whoever ponders it. The Prophets' miracles all died with their deaths, but the Quran is an everlasting miracle that will continue to impress with its uniqueness whoever recites it until the end of time. The previous Books were confined to delivering the guidance of Allah, but the miracles associated with them were separate. The miracles of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* were the staff that turned into a snake and his hand that shone when he brought it out of his pocket, but his book was the Torah. The miracles of Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* were reviving the dead, restoring hearing to the deaf, and curing the leprous, but his book was

the Bible. However, Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* had his Book that delivered divine guidance and his principal miracle that proved his truthfulness both represented by the Glorious Quran.

For this reason, when the disbelievers of Mecca asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to level the mountains of Mecca, rend the land beneath them apart, and give life to their dead to affirm his truthfulness, Allah revealed to him: '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 Allah's hands...' (*ar-Ra'd*: 31). Allah is *the Almighty* Creator Who has absolute Power to do all that. Still, had they pondered the Quran, it would have sufficed for them. It would have been enough as evidence for the Prophet's truthfulness.

Some orientalists have posed this question: If the aspect of miraculousness of the Quran is represented in its unique eloquence, then it is only a challenge to Arabs. How then do you claim that Islam is addressed to all people, and in what way can the Quran be miraculous to non-Arabs? First, if Arabs who enjoy a particularly masterful command of the Arabic language and natural fluency in it have paled before this challenge, others who are less versed in the Arabic language must be even more awed before its miraculousness.

Second, who says that the only aspect of miraculousness in the Quran is its unique eloquence? This One aspect- even though addressed to all people- was specifically intended for the first community who received the Message- those who would carry the burden of delivering faith to the world. When the Message of Islam began to spread throughout various regions of the world and come in to contact with non-Arabs, the most auspicious aspect of Quranic miraculousness has been quite another thing, besides its linguistic uniqueness.

The Quran reveals to people various things, stories, and phenomena totally unknown to us. Science comes every day with a new discovery that pertains to something foretold in the Quran centuries before science knew it. The Quran was revealed to an unlettered Prophet and was first addressed to an unlettered community; however science is yet to come with new discoveries that remove the veil from other scientific allusions the Quran has made. Is not this sufficient to render the Quran miraculous even to non-Arabs? Secrets of

the Quran are unending that we are still pondering over certain verses of it and waiting for science to explore their meanings.

Not so long ago, the atom was found out to be the smallest material unit in existence, to which the Quran has already alluded, as in the following verse: 'Whoever has done an atom's-weight of good will see it, but whoever has done an atom's-weight of evil will see that' (*az-Zalzala*: 7-8). However, with the advancement of tools and research methods, scientists have managed to split the atom. Seeing that there was something in creation smaller than the atom some thought this could be a fine opportunity to attack the Quran and cast doubts over its truthfulness and precision. However, whoever investigates the Book of Allah will find a reference to this recent scientific development in His words: '... there does not lie concealed from your Lord the weight of an atom in the earth or in the heaven, nor anything less than that nor greater, but it is in a clear book' (*Yunus*: 61). Even a split atom has been afforded a mention in the Book of Allah. Does all that not make the Quran miraculous?

So Allah posed a challenge to all His servants when He said: '... Even if all mankind and jinn came together to produce something like this Quran, they could not produce anything like it...' (*al-Isra'*: 88). Arabs used to believe that every talented poet or eloquent wordsmith was inspired by a demon. They believed those artful demons all resided in a valley referred to as the 'Valley of Ingenuity.' This explains why Allah does not limit the challenge to people only, but whoever they believed was the source of their inspiration. They attributed their exceptional competence in language to jinn, fine, they too may be included in the challenge!

Another point is also worth highlighting respecting the words of Allah: '... to produce something like this Quran...' (*al-Isra'*: 88). The challenge is to produce '...something like...' the Quran, something only near it in magnificence and miraculousness. As for producing an identical version of the Quran, as for producing a book exactly equal to it is too much for all humankind and jinn that Allah would not pose it as a challenge to them. The Quran is the word of Allah, enough said. It is impossible to produce its equal. Therefore, the challenge is just to try to even imitate the Quran in the aspects of its uniqueness. As such, the only thing imaginable within the realm of a

potential challenge is to produce something like the Quran. A copy cannot match the excellence of the origin. An imitated version of a thing is, needless to say, less in every respect than the original composition. If an even less marvellous copy is so hard to produce, an equal to the original would be impossible. Allah then says: ‘... they could not produce anything like it...’ (*al-Isra*: 88). If they cannot produce even a replica, can they ever manage to produce the original?

Allah concludes the verse by these words that add even more power to the challenge: ‘... however much they helped each other’ (*al-Isra*: 88). The word used in the original text of the verse is *zhahir* which is the Arabic for ‘helper’ or ‘supporter’. This challenge is indeed too momentous to be undertaken by a single person, so Allah poses it to all His servants collectively. Let all humankind and jinn to come forward with all that they possess in terms of creativity and genius. Let people seek assistance from the jinn they claim to awaken their muses. Let all efforts and talents collaborate in this attempt and let the able assist the feeble to meet this challenge, yet they would not meet it!

Has the challenge remained confined to producing something like the Quran? No, for Allah has reduced this challenge to producing even only ten chapters like the Quran⁽¹⁾ or even a single chapter like it.⁽²⁾ With the challenge thus reduced, their failure and incapacity are shown even more strikingly, for though Allah has made the challenge easier, those addressed by it- all humankind and jinn- are still, and would forever be, very far from meeting it. Each time the challenge is thus made easier, its loftiness shows more impressively. Certainly, challenging them to produce only a single chapter like the Quran heightens the challenge and is more expressive of the Quran’s inimitability. No one has been in any way capable of producing even one verse that is even remotely similar to anything in the Book of Allah.

(1) Allah poses this challenge in His words: ‘If they say, “He has invented it himself,” say, “Then produce ten invented *suras* (chapters) like it, and call in whoever you can beside Allah, if you are truthful.”’ (*Hud*: 13)

(2) Allah says: ‘If you have doubts about the revelation We have sent down to Our servant, then produce a single *sura* (chapter) like it- enlist whatever supporters you have other than Allah- if you truly [think you can].’ (*al-Baqara*: 23)

Now, let us look at that challenge from another perspective. It is also meant to stress the principle that all people are equal at the sight of Allah. As a matter of fact, this principle of equality among all people is one of the main reasons that incited enmity towards Islam in the hearts of the disbelievers. Acknowledging that the Quran is the word of Allah necessarily entails acknowledging Prophethood of Muhammad and elevating him highly to a status that none of them- including the nobility-ever attained. That acknowledgement meant he would be far above those who opposed him, rejected his call, oppressed his followers, and plotted his assassination. Allah describes this attitude of the disbelievers in His words: ‘And they said, “Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities?”’ (*az-Zukhruf*: 31) This implies that perhaps they might have accepted the Quran had it been revealed to someone other than Prophet Muhammad. They were driven by envy over the high-status Allah has granted him through this revelation, as Allah says in this verse: ‘Do they envy [other] people for the bounty⁽¹⁾ Allah has granted them?...’ (*an-Nisa*’: 54) Glory is to Him Who distributes worldly provisions according to His Wisdom and Mercy. Even though Allah has granted people powers and means through which to seek His bounties that pertain to the life of this world, He has not granted them the keys of provision, for He grants whatever He wills to whomever He wills. If people have no power over worldly provisions, how is it that they want to interfere with the issue of revelation? How is it that they want to withhold the Mercy of Allah He has decreed for His servants? ‘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...’ (*az-Zukhruf*: 32).

In the next verse, Allah speaks about the nature of the Quranic discourse:

(1) i.e. the Prophethood given to Muhammad. [*The Quran, A New Translation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem*]

وَلَقَدْ صَرَّفْنَا لِلنَّاسِ فِي هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ مِنْ كُلِّ مَثَلٍ
فَأَبَى أَكْثَرُ النَّاسِ إِلَّا كُفُورًا ﴿٨٩﴾

**In this Quran, We have set out all kinds of examples for
people, yet most of them persist in disbelieving [89]
(The Quran, *al-Isra*: 89)**

This verse refers to the variation of the Quranic style. This is not meant only to impress the mind through the rhetorical effect, but also to address the different minds with different kind of arguments that suit each. Allah has sent down the Glorious Quran to address all the different types of human dispositions. The Quran deals with a wide range of topics and offers insights on a similarly vast range of meanings. In light of this, it necessarily displays various styles of address that deal with the same issue from various perspectives. Every issue is explicated in several ways for all different minds to comprehend.

Let us examine, for example, how Allah deals with the essence of the Islamic creed: the divinity and oneness of Him *the Exalted and Almighty*. In one verse, He says: 'If there had been in the heavens or earth any gods *illa* (but; except; other than) Him, both heavens and earth would be in ruins...' (*al-Anbiya*: 22). Some have raised a misconception concerning this verse. Since the Arabic word *illa* also denotes 'without', some have alleged that the verse appears to mean: If there were other deities of whom Allah were not one, only then would the heavens and earth fall to ruin! In other words, the existence of Allah is what matters. Therefore, so long as He exists, it would do no harm if other deities shared in His dominion! The heavens and earth would only fall to ruin if Allah were not among those other deities! the Exalted above what they ascribe to Him!

This faulty understanding stems from misunderstanding the meaning of *illa*. In this verse, it means 'other than'. Therefore, the verse means if there were deities other than Allah presiding over the heavens and earth, if any other deities shared in His dominion, they would inevitably fall to ruin.

In another verse, Allah deals with the same issue of Islamic monotheism, but in a different style: 'Allah has never had a child. Nor is there any god

beside Him— if there were, each god would have taken his creation aside and tried to overcome the others...’ (*al-Mu'minun*: 91). Allah is Exalted above having a son or a partner. Furthermore, if there were other deities with Him, each of them would have claimed independence with that which he has created. Each would have selected a specific part of existence to be his dominion. Each would have attempted to lord over the others Whose will would be executed if those deities disagreed on something? If one of them gained victory, how would the rest- the defeated ones- be ever called deities despite their inability and defeat?! He is only One God: Allah *Glorified is He!*

Here is a third verse of the Quran that deals with the matter of Islamic monotheism in a different way: ‘Say, “If there were other gods along with Him, as they say there are, then they would have tried to find a way to the Lord of the Throne”’ (*al-Isra'*: 42). Were there other deities, they would have punished the Lord of the Throne for assuming His role as Possessor of the dominion of the heavens and earth and excluding them all!

In another verse, Allah displays another different proof that He is the One God; He says: ‘Allah bears witness that there is no god but Him...’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 18). There has never been anyone who has come forward to object to Allah’s being the One God by claiming to be a god himself. Logically, since no contender has even objected to this declaration or made a statement that contradicts it, this means that divinity rests securely with Him Who has ascribed it to Himself. In principle: what is declared as truth should be held as truth unless another party declares or proves otherwise. We have previously used an analogy to clarify this meaning- and as we always say, this is only for illustration, for Allah is far elevated above all comparison. We said before: suppose a host found a wallet full of cash in the place where his guests had been seated. He announced that to the group and displayed the wallet to them. One of them said the wallet belonged to him and no one contradicted his claim. That being the case, would the host have any grounds to doubt his claim?

That was one example, and there are many others. We have seen how Allah has dealt in the Quran with the issue of monotheism. Now let us see how He refutes the claim that He has begot a son. Some of the people of the Scripture have made the following allegation, as Allah quotes them in the

Quran: ‘The Jews said, “‘Uzayr (Ezra) is the son of Allah,” and the Christians said, “The Messiah is the son of Allah”...’ (*at-Tawba*: 30). Allah refutes this allegation in His words: ‘The Creator of the heavens and earth! How could He have children when He has no spouse...’ (*al-An‘am*: 101). Another verse also deals with the same issue, yet in a different manner: ‘They assign daughters to Allah⁽¹⁾—may He be exalted! —and the [sons] they desire to themselves’ (*an-Nahl*: 57). They not only alleged that Allah has children, but also assigned to him daughters in particular, for they used to despise them, and claimed sons for themselves since they were the favoured offspring. ‘Are you to have the male and He the female? That would be a most unjust distribution!’ (*an-Najm*: 21-22)

Thus, the Quran varies its styles and methods of discourse. The purpose of this variation is to offer several kinds of logical arguments to address the different types of minds that receive the message. The turn of mind and the disposition inevitably differ from one person to another. Among the various mechanisms through which Allah presents truths in the Quran is the use of parables. It is quite common in the Arabic language to use parables, adages, and aphorisms, being precise and concise meanwhile delivering the intended meaning. An adage represents an unchanging impression, which makes it fit to be used whenever an appropriate occasion presents itself.

For example, there is a common Arabic proverb that says, ‘What news have you brought, O Esam?’ The occasion of this proverb was that a man sent a woman called ‘Esam’ to ask on his behalf the hand of a woman he wanted to marry, so when she returned, he asked her that question. Since then, it has grown a common question to be asked to anyone who has been sent on any errand.⁽²⁾ People commonly say to someone who has an air of importance, ‘If you are a gust of wind, then prepare to meet a tornado!’ A proverb is an expressive sentence. Once said and adopted by people, it continues to be used

(1) “Some of the pagan Arabs called angels the daughters of Allah. This is doubly blasphemous because of the contempt in which daughters were held in a warrior community, to the extent of female infanticide...” [*The Quran, A New Translation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem*]

(2) Ibn Mandhur says in *Lisan Al-Arab* lexicon that *Esam* is a man’s name and that it refers to Isam ibn Shahir Al-Jarmi, the usher of An-Nu‘man ibn Al-Mundhir. The same is narrated by Az-Zirikli in *Al-A‘lam* (4/233).

with the same wording whenever an occasion arises. As for an aphorism, it is a witty sentence that expresses a general truth. It is usually concise but conveys pithy meanings. A famous one also translates: 'A true brother is not always born by your mother.' Another says: 'A woman does not need to be taught how to veil.'⁽¹⁾ 'He who exhausts his riding animal can never reach his destination' is another traditional aphorism. Poetry also sometimes gets so widely known that some verses become almost a maxim, like the following:

A sick mouth infected with bitterness

Finds all tastes bitter even pure water!

There is also the following famous couplet:

Miserable is him who has a king's aspiration,

But his means are straightened by destitution!

A student who only bothers to study right before the exams, when it is quite too late, should know that 'A quiver has to be filled with arrows a good time before going hunting', not right when the prey is seen!

Adages and aphorisms are thus so common in languages, and this is why the Quran has adopted them as one of the means of presenting truths. For example, Allah says: 'Allah does not disdain to propound a parable of a gnat, or of something [even] less than that...' (*al-Baqara*: 26). Allah is never ashamed to draw parables even with the meanest of creatures in order to engage every type of mind and drive the point home. Allah would draw a parable using a gnat or even a smaller creature, and in every form of Allah's creation is a manifestation of His Majesty. Every bit of His creation, no matter how small or seemingly simple, is miraculous.

A similar parable is presented here: 'O people! a parable is set forth, therefore listen to it: surely those whom you call upon besides Allah cannot create a fly, though they should all gather for it, and should the fly snatch away anything from them, they could not take it back from it; weak are the

(1) According to Ibn Barri, this saying means that someone who is experienced in something does not need preaching or instructing. A woman does not need advice about how to veil herself with a head covering. [*Lisan Al-Arab*]

invoker and the invoked' (*al-Hajj*: 73). Allah also says in another verse: 'The parable of those who take guardians besides Allah is as the parable of the spider that makes for itself a house; and most surely the frailest of the houses is the spider's house did they but know' (*al-'Ankabut*: 41). The use of parables serves a good purpose conveying the meanings intended to different kinds of people. The Quran does not stick to one monotonous tone or style. On the contrary, it addresses every category of human intellect based on their different backgrounds and capacities to understand, hence the variation.

This is so clear also in the Hadiths of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He would receive the same question from several of his companions, yet give a different answer to each, depending on the condition of him who was asking the question. For example, Prophet Muhammad was more than once asked, 'What is the most meritorious of all deeds, O Messenger of Allah?' To one of those who asked that, he replied, 'Observance of *salat* (the Prayer) within its appointed time.'⁽¹⁾ To another, he said, 'Filial piety, (duty to one's children)'⁽²⁾ and on a third occasion, he gave this answer, 'To greet your brother with a smiling face'.⁽³⁾ By those various answers, perhaps Prophet Muhammad was addressing a weakness- respecting religious practice- in each of his Companions. It was not a one-size-fits-all approach that was applied for everybody, but quite the reverse. The way he dealt with every issue showed an obvious sense of considering each person's condition, needs, and unique nature.

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- (1) 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud said, 'I asked the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* "Which deed is the most meritorious?" he replied, "Observance of *salat* (the prayer) within its appointed time."' [Cited by Muslim in his *Sahih*, Hadith no. 85 in "The Book of Faith"]
 - (2) Abu 'Amr Ash-Shaybani narrated, 'The owner of this house- pointing at the house of Abdullah- told us: 'I asked the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* "Which deed is most beloved to Allah the Exalted and Almighty?" He replied, 'Observance of *salat* (the prayer) within its appointed time.' I then asked, "Then what?" He replied, "Then filial piety."' [Cited by Al-Bukhari in his *Sahih* (5970) and Muslim in his *Sahih* (85) in "The Book of Faith"]
 - (3) Abu Dharr Allah *be pleased with him* said, "The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* told me, 'Do not underestimate the value of any good deed (no matter how seemingly insignificant), even if it is just meeting your brother with a smiling face.'" [Cited by Muslim in his *Sahih* (2626) and Ahmad in his *Musnad* (5/173)]

Back to the verse we are considering; Allah concludes it by saying: ‘... yet most of them persist in disbelieving’ (*al-Isra'*: 89). The original Arabic text of the verse uses the word *aba* which denotes ‘rejection’. Furthermore, the entire structure of the verse also conveys the fact that they reject faith and are pleased with anything apart from it, hence their persistence in disbelief.

Allah says in the following verse:⁽¹⁾

وَقَالُوا لَنْ تُؤْمِنَ لَكَ حَتَّى تَفْجُرَ لَنَا مِنَ الْأَرْضِ يَنْبُوعًا

**They say, ‘We will not believe for you [Muhammad] until
you make a spring gush out of the ground for us [90]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 90)**

It is a truth basically acknowledged that every human being is subject to vicissitudes. No one perpetually remains in the same condition forever. No one knows what will happen to him tomorrow. Allah is the only unchanging truth. As long as this is the case, it is implausible for anyone to judge anything conclusively concerning the future. No one owns the future. It is totally in the Hand of Allah Whose Knowledge always encompasses all things and Who is not subject to changes.

Allah has made it the nature of everything in this temporary life that decline must follow prosperity. When one reaches the peak, it means he will inevitably start his journey downwards. A poet has expressed this meaning so well when he said:

(1) *This is the occasion on which this verse was revealed, as narrated by Wahidi in his ‘Asbab An-Nuzul (pp.168-170) on the authority of Ibn Abbas: ‘Utba, Shayba, Abu Sufyan, An-Nadr ibn Al-Harith, Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira and Abu Jahl, among other notables from Quraysh, all gathered on top of the Ka’ba and agreed, “Let us send for Muhammad, argue with him and oppose him until it becomes impossible for his followers to continue to follow him.” They sent him this message, “The noblest of your people have gathered on your account; they would like to speak with you.” The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him went to them without delay, for he thought that perhaps he was beginning to get through to them— he was always worried on their account and wanted wholeheartedly to see their hearts open for right guidance. Besides, their animosity was becoming hard to bear, so he eagerly responded to their summons.’ Once in their company, a long conversation ensued between the two parties, which Wahidi details in his volume, and it was on that occasion that the verse was revealed.’*

When a thing grows perfect, watch for its decline!

Once a peak is reached, a fall is sure to come next!

This makes it quite unwise to wish to have perfect lives and perfect blessings. How often people lament that something is missing and wish it were perfect. They do not realize that it is in fact the deficiency within every blessing that causes it to last. If the blessing is allowed to come full circle, what then is to be expected, after perfection but that the perfect thing must start its journey to diminishing? Stay contented with that which is missing, for perhaps it is what keeps envy and grudge at bay. A father would lament that one of his children has not been up to his expectations. He would wish that child was as good as his siblings. He has not come to the realization that Allah has decreed this out of His Wisdom. This one aspect of imperfection is perhaps your safeguard against the animosity of those who bear you ill will. Mutanabbi⁽¹⁾ alluded to this meaning in his praise of Sayf Ad-Dawla⁽²⁾:

All eyes are envious of your perfection!

Ward off their envy by displaying a fault!

They look at your perfection with envy, so display any aspect of imperfection to avert the wickedness of their envious eyes!

In the verse we are reflecting on, the disbelievers said they would never embrace faith unless what they asked came true. They made an assertion that they would still be disbelievers in the future, but is it in any mortal's scope to determine what will happen in the future? It is only for Allah to decide what

(1) He is Ahmad ibn Husayn Abu At-Tayyib Al-Kindi. He was born in 303 AH in the city of Kufa in an area called Kinda. He was raised in an Eastern Mediterranean province, but shortly after that he moved to the rural areas where his command of Arabic was sharpened and his appetite for literature was whetted. He produced his first lines of poetry when he was a child. He withdrew to the remote area of Samawa until the Sovereign of the city of Homs took him as a captive and eventually imprisoned him until he repented and repudiated some of his earlier claims. He died in 354 AH at the age of fifty-two. [*Az-Zirikli in Al-A'alam 1/115*]

(2) He is Ali ibn Abdullah ibn Hamdan At-Taghlubi, Abu Al-Hasan Sayf Ad-Dawla. He was born in present-day Silvan in the Diyarbakir Province in 303AH. He is narrated to have had extensive confrontations with the Romans. He ruled Wasit, Damascus, and Aleppo which is where he died. He was buried in Silvan in 356 AH at the age of fifty-three. [*Az-Zirikli in Al-A'alam 4/303*]

will happen tomorrow. It is worthy of mention that one of the disbelievers who made this assertion later converted to Islam. They vowed to remain disbelievers until Prophet Muhammad made a spring gush out of the ground for them. However, they turned believers and it did not take a spring gushing forth from the earth to substantiate their faith.

During the Conquest of Mecca, 'Ikrima ibn Abu Jahl said what he said at Al-Khandama⁽¹⁾, but later went to Prophet Muhammad and declared faith.⁽²⁾ He fought side by side with Khalid ibn Al-Walid at the Battle of Yarmuk where he was dealt a mortal wound. As Khalid *Allah be pleased with him* carried 'Ikrima, he said, 'Is this a death that would make the Messenger of Allah pleased with me?'

No one is, therefore, capable of determining the future unless the outcomes of present events are in his hands. He must be capable of preventing any change in circumstance so he may control the future. Does any mortal possess this ability? No, Allah is the One Who is in control of the present and future. Allah says in the chapter of *al-Kafirun*: 'Say [Prophet], "Disbelievers: I do not worship what you worship, you do not worship what I worship, I will never worship what you worship, you will never worship what I worship' (*al-Kafirun*: 1-4). The chapter negates that the Prophet does not and will not

(1) Al-Khandama is a well-known mountain in Mecca. Ibn Barri narrated that during the Conquest of Mecca, Khalid ibn Al-Walid Allah be pleased with him confronted some of the idolaters at Al-Khandama and successfully routed them. That was called The Day of Al-Khandama. [Lisan Al-'Arab]

On the day of the Conquest of Mecca, Companion Bilal ibn Rabah stood on top of the Ka'ba and proclaimed the call to the Noon Prayer. Seeing that, 'Ikrima ibn Abu Jahl said, 'Indeed Allah has blessed Abu Al-Hakam (his father who had died as a disbeliever) for sparing him the scene of this slave ascending Ka'ba to say what he just said!' [Cited by Al-Bayhaqi in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa 4/328]

(2) 'Ikrima ibn Abu Jahl fled after the Conquest of Mecca. He took to the sea among other and they encountered a storm. Some called out, 'Now is the time for turning to Allah with sincere devotion, for indeed, in this situation, the other gods you serve cannot help you in the least. 'Ikrima said, 'If Allah only can help me while at sea, then none but Him can help me on land!' Then, he prayed, 'O Allah, if you save me from the perilous circumstance in which I know find myself, I vow to go to Muhammad and place my hand inside his (as an expression of submission to the truth) and hopefully I will find him forgiving and generous.' When he returned from the sea unharmed, he went to the Prophet and declared faith. [*Al-Isaba fi Tamyiz As-Sahaba*, 4/258, Bio. 5632]

worship the false gods of the disbelievers, nor will they (if they persist in disbelief) worship his Lord *Glorified is He*. One may ask: how does the Quran negate the possibility of something occurring in the future? The Quran is the word of Him Whose Omnipotent Knowledge encompasses all things. He is the One Who is never affected by change. He is the One Who decrees what will happen and what will not.

So the verse we are considering states that the disbelievers vowed to persist in disbelief ‘... until you make a *yanbu*’ (spring; springhead) gush out of the ground for us’ (*al-Isra*: 90). In another verse, Allah says about the Great Flood that took place at the time of Prophet Nuh (Noah): ‘[We] burst the earth with gushing springs...’ (*al-Qamar*: 12). The gushing forth is the process by which the water hidden in the earth is allowed to come to the surface. A spring is water that emerges from the earth; it is very plentiful, so no matter how much water is taken from it, it would not dry. However, its waters may decrease slightly at times when rains are scarce, for example. A springhead, on the other hand, is the never-ending source, and this is to which the verse refers. It consistently overflows without any decrease in water levels. An example of this is the *Zamzam* Well in Mecca. Perhaps the disbelievers made that request out of intense need of water at that time.

So the disbelievers asked Prophet Muhammad to cause a spring to gush out of the ground, and:

أَوْ تَكُونَ لَكَ جَنَّةٌ مِّنْ نَّحِيلٍ وَعِنَبٍ فَتُفَجَّرَ الْأَنْهَارُ خِلَالَهَا تَفْجِيرًا ﴿٩١﴾

Or until you have a garden of date palms and vines, and make rivers pour through them [91] (The Quran, *al-Isra*: 91)

They have previously asked water for themselves, and now they are asking Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for a garden. By garden we mean an orchard or a plot of date-palm trees and grapevines. These were specifically the two most well known types of produce at this time and in this place. As for the portion of the verse which reads: ‘...and make rivers pour through them.’ (*al-Isra*: 91), it implies that they would like to see the rivers gush forth and continue running beside the gardens, so as to secure a perpetual water source for the gardens.

The next 'challenge' they requested from Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* was:

أَوْ تُسْقِطَ السَّمَاءَ كَمَا زَعَمْتَ عَلَيْنَا كِسْفًا أَوْ تَأْتِيَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ قِيْلًا ﴿٩٢﴾

**Or make the sky fall on us in pieces, as you claimed will happen; or bring God and the angels before us face to face[92]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 92)**

The word (*za'am*) means an alleged claim that has no bearing in reality. They say that, 'The allegation is the horse which can carry a lie on its back'. To this end, Allah tells that those who deny the truth 'claim' that they will never be raised from the dead. (*at-Taghabun*: 7). So, if they are accusing Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* of making alleged claims, then they should beware that he is only conveying the message of Allah, that he is faithfully transmitting the message of his Lord to them. Thus, if they wish to issue an accusation that anyone is making alleged claims, let them direct that accusation to the True Lord *Glorified is He* since no blame should accrue to His Messenger.

The only reason they recalled this issue of the sky falling upon them is because prior to this the True Lord *Glorified is He* had asked them if they do not think about what is in front of them and behind them in the heavens and earth! And that if He wished, He could make the earth swallow them, or make fragments from the heavens fall down upon them. (*Saba'*: 9) This explains why they asked Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* to put this warning in action! The word (*kisafa*), in this verse, means fragments.

Allah says: '...or bring Allah and the angels before us face to face.' (*al-Isra'*: 92), this is like saying, 'Until we are able to see them before us face-to-face.' A meaning identical to this one can be located in verse 21 of the chapter of *al-Furqan* where Allah says that those who do not believe that they are destined to meet him are wont to wonder about why no angels have been sent down to them, or why they cannot see their Lord!

Anyone who reflects deeply on the requests the disbelievers made of Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* will find that they were nothing short of deliberate attempts to conjure up the most unimaginably far-removed

scenarios from reality. This offers us strong indication that they did not really desire faith and guidance in the first place. Quite the reverse, they wanted to argue and to invoke an opportunity to express their stubbornness. For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* rebuffs their obstinacy and stubbornness and tells them that even if He were to send down angels upon them, or even if He made the dead speak to them, or even if He were to assemble before them, face to face, all the things that can prove the truth, they would still not believe. (*al-An'am*: 111) Then Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says relaying their requests:

أَوْ يَكُونُ لَكَ بَيْتٌ مِّنْ زُخْرَفٍ أَوْ تَرْفَىٰ فِي السَّمَاءِ وَلَنْ نُؤْمِنَ لِرُفَيْكَ حَتَّىٰ تَنْزِلَ
عَلَيْنَا كِتَابًا نَّقْرُؤُهُ قُلْ سُبْحَانَ رَبِّي هَلْ كُنْتُ إِلَّا بَشَرًا رَسُولًا ﴿٩٣﴾

Or have a house made of gold; or ascend into the sky – even then, we will not believe in your ascension until you send a real book down for us to read.' Say, 'Glory be to my Lord! Am I anything but a mortal, a messenger?' [93]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 93)

A house (*al-bayt*): is a place where one regularly spends the night, and (*zukhruf*) is something used as an ornament (expressed here as gold). At the time, gold was the most precious thing that could be used for decoration. Indeed, almost every type of adornment will fade as time goes by and lose its lustre, and this will make it lose the very attribute that made it beautiful in the first place. Gold is a noted exception to this general rule; only if it is pure (24k) gold that is unmixed with any other metal. Pure gold does not rust, nor does it interact with other elements. For this reason, it retains its lustre and sheen. So, if we imagine a house made of gold, what would it look like?

Those who insist on advocating empty pretences that civilization is all about luxury and superfluous extravagances, have taken to the practice of covering less expensive material (like wood) with coats of gold; like we see in various imported items. They do this with the purpose of preserving the lustre and superficial beauty of things.

Then, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: '...or ascend into the sky...' (*al-Isra'*: 93). That is to say: that you have a set of stairs upon which you can

ascend into the sky. Obviously, they rushed to issue this statement but then opted to tone it down a bit because they must have realized how farfetched it is, so they just bluntly blurted out the true essence of their ingrained obstinacy, saying: '...even then, we will not believe in your ascension until you send a real book down for us to read...' (*al-Isra'*: 93).

It is as though they are insisting on showing their stubbornness to Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him*. In the first request, they are liars (when they said it is enough to convince them of his truthfulness) and in the following request they are also liars. The truth is that even if Allah revealed unto them the book they requested (in the third request), this still would not cause them to believe in the message. The True Lord *Glorified is He* rebuts them, saying that even if He had sent down to Muhammad, a book inscribed on parchment, and they had touched it with their own hands, the disbelievers would still say that it is nothing but blatant sorcery (*al-An'am*: 7).

Pay close attention to the way that the Quran refutes the previously mentioned obstinacy. Allah says: '...Say, 'Glory be to my Lord!...' (*al-Isra'*: 93); it is a phrase which indicates the magnificence and utter transcendence of the True Lord *Glorified is He*; a flagrant challenge to the whole universe and the entire created order. It is a phrase that is only mentioned in reference to Allah *the Glorified and Exalted*. There never will occur a time when people say this phrase in reference to each other despite the presence of tyrants and despots—whom the world never seems to be short of—whom people desire to flatter and cajole. It is a phrase issued based on free will; it is possible for anybody to say it; nonetheless, no one would dare say it in reference to anyone besides Allah.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* challenges mankind within things that are within their power and free will. But, at other times, He challenges them in matters which are intended to demonstrate that He knows that the limited ability of all mankind could never stand a chance at the challenge in hand. An example of this is when Allah *Glorified is He* damned the hands of Abu Lahab to be ruined and that he too will be ruined! That neither his wealth nor his gains will help him, and that he will burn in the flaming Fire. (*al-Masad*: 1-3) Of course, these verses were revealed in respect to Abu Lahab. At the time of their revelation he was a disbeliever, but there was a likely chance he could

have accepted faith as others from among the disbelievers had accepted it. People like 'Umar and Al-'Abbas *Allah be pleased with them* and others became committed believers and at the time these verses were revealed, they had not come to Islam yet. So, what was it that gave Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* the assurance that Abu Lahab would never believe? Indeed, he had conveyed the message of his Lord—the Quran—which had been recited, memorized, and recorded; with this clear statement that Abu Lahab would die as a disbeliever and that his ultimate destination would be the inferno of hell. Here, we must point out: Was it not within the power and will of Abu Lahab to make this statement a mere falsity? Could he not have stood and uttered among his people the testimony of faith, 'There is no deity to be worshiped but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah'; even if it was just sheer hypocrisy? After doing so, would he not have been able to accuse the Quran and Muhammad of lying? Nevertheless, none of this happened because the Speaker of these words is Allah, the Lord of all the worlds.

Within the scope of this challenge, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has attributes and names. All His names are derived from His attributes except in one case: The eminent utterance that is derived from His pure essence (*Allah*). It is the name given to the Divine Essence and it is not derived from any attribute from among the attributes of Allah *the Glorified and Exalted*. The fully Capable, the Much-Forgiving, the Ever-Living, and the All-Sustaining and other names of Allah are all derived from attributes. The name (*Allah*) on the other hand, is a designation given to the Divine Essence under which all of the other attributes are subsumed.

In this manner, the Creator left a door open for a challenge to all mankind, they were free to choose the name (*Allah*) for themselves or their children. This challenge was even declared within the Book of Allah when Allah asked if we knew of anyone worthy of the same name as He? (*Maryam: 65*) Yet, no disbeliever has ever been so bold as to call himself by this name; thus, this challenge remains standing until the establishment of the Final Hour. Indeed, this is because Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* is true and the belief in Him is so entrenched within the human psyche, even the disbelievers. If they knew that this word (*Allah*) was nothing more than an utterance designating a lie or that

it was a word that did not coincide with any reality, undoubtedly, they would have been emboldened to call others (*Allah*) without the slightest bit of constraint. But, as long as they know that the name (*Allah*) is true and refers to a reality, they would not dare be so bold as to use the name inappropriately or use it in reference to themselves, for fear of an unforeseeable backlash or yet an unimaginable punishment.

For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* responded to the obstinacy the disbelievers were displaying through their requests from Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* by saying: ‘...Say, ‘Glory be to my Lord!’ (*al-Isra'*: 93) Indeed, their requests have reached the absolute limit where one can only express his utter astonishment by saying, ‘Glory be to my Lord!’ This is an exclamatory phrase that is relevant to no one but Allah. By mentioning this phrase, it is almost as if we consign the entire affair to Allah. For surely, the Quran contained enough miracles and wonders to obviate all of the things that they requested!

Allah asks them, in another verse if it is not enough for them that He has sent down to them the Scripture that is recited, and contains a mercy and a lesson for the believing people!? (*al-'Ankabut*: 51)

The Arabic character *hamza* used in the beginning is an interrogative particle intended as an expression of amazement, so the verse says, ‘Have they not had enough wonders, while I have revealed this scripture to them? Indeed, this scripture—with all its marvels—makes the need for anything else unnecessary.’

The verse goes on: ‘...Am I anything but a mortal, a messenger?’ (*al-Isra'*: 93) It means: ‘Did I ever make the claim that I was a Deity? I am only a human being; I am merely conveying the message of my Lord, and I only do what He commands me to do’. In another verse Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says to His prophet to tell them that it is not for him to change this Book of his own accord; he only follows what is revealed to him since he fears the torment of Judgement Day, if he disobeyed his Lord. (*Yunus*: 15)

Afterward, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا مَنَعَ النَّاسَ أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا إِذْ جَاءَهُمْ الْهُدَىٰ إِلَّا أَنْ قَالُوا أَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ بَشَرًا رَسُولًا ﴿٩٤﴾

The only thing that kept these people from believing, when guidance came to them, was that they said, ‘How could God have sent a human being as a messenger?’ [94] (The Quran, *al-Isra*: 94)

This means that the only issue that stood between them and believing was this: How can a human being become a messenger? This was the only thing they could not push down their throats or digest: ‘...How could Allah have sent a human being as a messenger?’ (*al-Isra*: 94) Pondering on the issue of how a messenger could possibly convey any message from Allah, will always reach a single rational deduction; the conveyance could only be done by a human being. How could a different species or order of being be expected to communicate with human beings? There must be some sort of medium receiving the conveyance from Allah and delivering it to mankind. As a matter of fact, human beings are incapable of receiving any form of direct interaction from such a high and intense Entity. So, there are stages needed to incorporate this task, since it is not granted to any mortal that Allah should speak to him except through revelation or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger to reveal by His command what He will. (*ash-Shura*: 51)

In this case we dare to ask, ‘But we have a human messenger, so how does Allah address him?’ For this, an emissary is selected from among those belonging to a higher order (the angels); Allah chooses message-bearers from among His angels (*al-Hajj*: 75). Next, Allah chooses a messenger from among the human beings, who will faithfully receive the conveyance from the angel who was chosen, to convey its contents to us (human beings). This is because we are incapable of withstanding a direct encounter with the True Lord *Glorified is He*.

To make it clearer, let me offer this analogy—and as always, even the loftiest similitude pales in comparison to Allah’s Glory: If you want to light a small lamp but the electrical current available has a high-voltage, would you be able to use that current to light the small lamp? Of course We would not, since it would burn the lamp instantly. So, what are you to do when faced with such a situation? The only thing that you can do is using a transformer—a medium. This device will reduce the high voltage of the current and dispense

what is only needed to light the lamp (and what it can handle): Only then, can that lamp emit light. In the same manner, the True Lord *Glorified is He* chooses angels as emissaries—angels that can receive direct conveyance from Allah. He then chooses human beings—who can receive the Divine inspiration directly from the angels—to serve as messengers. Finally, the chosen messenger from among the human beings conveys and circulates the message among the members of his people from the human family. With this in mind, what is so strange about a human being serving as Allah's messengers? Why do you disprove of it when it is the most natural thing to do? That is why Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* wonders why it is so surprising to people that He has revealed His message to a man from among them so he could warn them! (*Yunus*: 2)

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us about the example of the town to whose people Allah sent two messengers but they rejected both, so He reinforced them with a third and they said to them, 'Truly, we are messengers to you.' (*Ya Sin*: 13-15). Still they rejected them and this means that their objection to the Messenger being human is anything but new. In fact, it has always been this way, that the disbelievers have been passing down since the time of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*.

Allah *Glorified is He* relays to us in the Quran the different things these people said like: we see nothing in you but a human like us, (*Hud*: 27), don not follow a mortal like yourselves or you will be losers, (*al-Mu'minun*: 34), and we will surely be sinking to error and folly if we followed any mortal from among us. (*al-Qamar*: 24) Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* urges us to realize the solid tradition established with all the Messengers and He tells us that He has never sent any messenger to mankind except a mortal human being whom He inspired. (*an-Nahl*: 43)

That is to say: Messengers to mankind cannot be angels; it is imperative that they be human beings in order to complete the process of revelation. If this was not the case, and the Messengers came as angels, how would all the people be able to see angels? They might say, 'Even though an angel will be concealed from us—and we cannot see it—but it can see us.' The only problem here is that conveyance of the Divine Message is not just about seeing or being seen; it is about interaction and exchange of discourse. For this reason, (even if an

angel were dispatched as a messenger) it would be necessary for him to present himself as a human being to effectively convey Allah's message. So, in the end we are right back where we started: The process of using a human being as a messenger is a natural progression and an inescapable fact.

Allah declares it so clearly that even if He had sent an angel as messenger, He would still have sent him in the form of a man, which would increase their confusion. (*al-An'am*: 9) Hence, there is no cause for stubbornness, obstinacy, or opposing the natural course that Allah has created and deemed suitable for His creatures.

Afterward, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ لَوْ كَانَتْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَلَائِكَةٌ يَمْشُونَ مُطْمَئِنِّينَ
لَنَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَلَكًا رَسُولًا

Say, 'If there were angels walking about on earth, feeling at home, We would have sent them an angel from Heaven as a messenger' [95] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 95)

The word 'Say' here introduces debunk aimed at the disbelievers. If there were angels walking on earth—feeling at home—We (Allah) would have sent an angel messenger, to be from their very type. The one conveying the message must be of the same type of the one to whom the message is being conveyed. This is expressed clearly within the lengthy Prophetic Hadith of Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*; the Hadith in which Jibril *peace be upon him* came to Muhammad, *peace and blessings upon him*, to ask him about some religious matters to teach the Companions. So, he asked him to define spiritual excellence (*ihsan*), faith (*iman*), and Islam? Jibril *peace be upon him* came to the gathering in the form of a man from the desert dwellers. After he completed his task, he set off without anyone being able to identify him. When those in attendance finally asked Muhammad, *peace and blessings upon him*, about him, he said: 'Indeed, this is Jibril; he came to teach you about your religion.'⁽¹⁾

(1) *An agreed upon Hadith of the Prophet. It was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (50) and likewise by Muslim in his Sahih (8); the narrator of this Hadith was 'Umar Ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him.*

One more thing which establishes the necessity of the Messengers being human is that the Messenger is assigned the task of being a moral example for his people, and Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* tells us that the Messenger of Allah is the optimum model for those of you who put their hope in Allah and the Last Day and remember Him often. (*al-Ahzab*: 21) So, how else can this good example be manifested? How would the people be guided to follow the model of an angel? The Messenger, when he conveys and clarifies the Way of Allah, must first embody the message he is presenting. So, he cannot issue them a command that he himself cannot apply; quite the reverse, he is foremost among the people in words as much as in actions.

In this way, you will always find that the true ruler or advisor is the one who applies the advice to himself first. Our leader 'Umar, whenever he wanted to legislate a law but recognized that this legislation would present a challenge for some wrongdoers, he would gather all the people, tell them of his proposal, and then warn them of the consequences of non-compliance saying something to this effect, 'I swear by the One in Whose Hands is my soul, whoever from among you disobeys my order, I shall punish him and make an example of him for all the Muslims. And this applies to me before it applies to anyone else.' This is the reason why 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* ruled large swaths of the world during his term. A man saw him once resting peacefully beneath a tree and said what would become later a famous adage: 'You ruled, you were just, you felt safe and so you slept!' In case of 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* it was never about ruling more territories or peoples, it was about ruling himself and so the whole earth made itself ruled by him. If truth be told, the ruler is but the centre of a sphere, and around him are other smaller spheres which see him and just follow his lead. Consequently, when they see him behaving righteously, they will also behave righteously, and no one will dare to defy him. But if they see him corrupting, they will exceed his actions and dwarf his corruption by manifolds.

Accordingly, we can say: There is no way anybody can rule someone else until he first rules himself. After this, the public will follow his lead and become compliant with his orders, without him needing to exert any extra effort.⁽¹⁾

(1) 'Umar Ibn Al-Khattab wrote to Musa Al-Ash'ari *Allah be pleased with them*: As for what follows: Indeed, the happiest shepherds is he whose flock is happiest with him and the=

Nowadays, we see rulers who have understood this principle of being a role model and a good example as it should be understood. We see them driving the best cars and living in the most luxurious mansions, and using even expensive devices, yet still they lead very simple life-styles. Some of them even live in mansions inherited from their fathers or grandfathers but they voluntarily renounce the pampered life styles and the ultra-luxurious living for the sake of being close to their own people.

Same with Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who advanced the Islamic method and way of living, while at the same he made himself the quintessential example of its moral and spiritual implications? We find Him urging the wealthy to give charity to those in need but subsequently prohibiting his household from accepting any charity. Similarly, while it is allowed for the Muslims to inherit assets from each other, whatever Muhammad, *peace and blessings upon him*, leaves behind cannot be inherited by his family; since his wealth and assets are charity to be given to impoverished members of the Muslim community.⁽¹⁾

So, Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessings upon him*, prohibited the members of his household from things that he allowed (and even encouraged) to be given to others. The goal was to set an example of how not to misuse one's power. This also safeguarded him from any intentional slandering the weak-minded might have tried to cast on to him or His character.

Accordingly, we can conclude that ruling is not about discriminating between the ruled and the ruler. Nor is it about giving some of the people privilege over others; only when the people sense equality will they submit to

= *most wretched of shepherds—in the consideration of Allah—is he whose flock is most wretched with him (as their leader). By no means should you indulge yourself, for indeed those under your lead will do the same. (Hilyat Al-Awaliya' 1/50)*

(1) Narrated by Muslim in his *Sahih* (1758) from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of 'Aisha Allah be pleased with her who said: {Once the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him had passed away, the wives of the Prophet wanted to dispatch 'Uthman ibn 'Affan to Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with them in order to ask him about their inheritance from the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him. 'Aisha Allah be pleased with her said to them, 'Did the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him not say: 'We (the Prophets) do not leave behind inheritance, that which we leave is charity.'} Al-Bukhari also narrated this Hadith in his *Sahih* (3711, 3712)

their ruler, render him their obedience and compliance, since he is not serving his own benefits but rather striving for the betterment of the entire society. This should be established by the fact that such a ruler enjoys a standard of living superior to their own in many respects.

Had the messenger come as an angel, he would not have been able to complete this role of providing a comprehensive example of how to lead an Islamic way of living. Had an 'angel' prophet ordered us to follow his example in performing some tasks, we would of course object, saying: 'How can we be expected to follow you? You are an angel; you do not have any base desires like us. You do not eat, drink, marry, or procreate. Indeed, what you have commanded us to do may be proper for someone like you, as for us we can never live up to that standard.' This is one of the reasons why it is imperative for a messenger to be human, so that we will not have any excuse for not complying with his orders, since he will be the first to implement what he teaches and all we need to do is follow his lead.

As I said earlier, imagine if you were in the jungle and you saw a lion manoeuvring gracefully and chasing its prey to prance on it, do you yearn to be a lion? Yet, when you see a mounted cavalryman sizing up his enemies and preparing to tackle them, you do yearn to be like him! Wisdom is: The human being will always be the example you will yearn to follow. Therefore, the process of the role model can never be established effectively unless this model was a human being. By now, we hope it is clear enough and that there is no reason to reject the natural process that Allah destined for conveying His message.

Afterward, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ كَفَىٰ بِاللَّهِ شَهِيدًا بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَكُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ بِعِبَادِهِ خَبِيرًا بَصِيرًا ﴿٩٦﴾

Say, 'God is witness enough between me and you. He knows and observes His servants well' [96] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 96)

(Say): This is a final response to the requests that they made for having miraculous wonders and to their objection to the Messengers being human: '...Allah is witness enough between me and you...' (*al-Isra'*: 96). The help of a witness is usually sought to help determine the outcome of some case, so

what case is at hand here? The case at hand here is the vexation that the disbelievers were causing Muhammad, *peace and blessings be upon him*. Indeed, they had requested from him that which wasn't in his power to deliver. But, those who tried to annoy Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not concern him at all; his entire focus was on his Lord. This is why he said: '...Allah is witness enough between me and you...' (*al-Isra'*: 96).

If the testimonies in worldly affairs require a witness who saw what happened—upon which an appropriate verdict will be determined—the testimony of the True Lord *Glorified is He* implies that He is the Witness who sees, the Judge who issues verdicts, and the One capable of executing the verdict He will issue.

This is the true meaning of the statement: '...Allah is witness enough between me and you...' (*al-Isra'*: 96). Indeed, Allah is enough for you within this matter because He is fully aware concerning His slaves. This means that He knows even the minutest details about them. In fact, He is even aware of the implications beyond their stubbornness and abstinence. Additionally, Allah is all seeing, so nothing that they do escapes him.

Afterward, the True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* says:

وَمَنْ يَهْدِ اللَّهُ فَهُوَ الْمُهْتَدِ وَمَنْ يُضِلِّ فَلَنْ تَجِدَ لَهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِنْ دُونِهِ
وَنَحْشُرُهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ عَلَىٰ وُجُوهِهِمْ عُمِيَٰ وَبِكُمَا وَصَمًا مَّا تُنْهَمُ جَهَنَّمَ
كُلَّمَا خَبَتْ زِدْنَاهُمْ سَعِيرًا

[Prophet], anyone God guides is truly guided, and you will find no protector other than Him for anyone He leaves astray. On the Day of Resurrection We shall gather them, lying on their faces, blind, dumb, and deaf. Hell will be their Home.

Whenever the Fire goes down, We shall make it blaze more fiercely for them [97] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 97)

Previously, we said guidance is of two types: The first is the 'clarification' guidance that is given to all of creation—believers and disbelievers—without restriction. Indeed, Allah makes the straight path clear for all people—believers and disbelievers alike—He guides them to it and clarifies its contents.

As for the other type of guidance, it is the aid and facilitation towards the process of carrying on the obligations contingent to the method the people believed in. It is this type of guidance that is specifically for the believer. After Allah gives him clear indication of what the truth is, the believer accepts faith, affirms its truth, and acknowledges the favours and blessings of Allah *the Glorified and Exalted*. Foremost among these favours and blessings is the fact that Allah has given him a Divine Method in running the affairs of his life. Essentially, divine aid and facilitation are gifts from Allah *the Glorified and Exalted*.

About guidance, the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us that He offered the tribe of Thamud His guidance, but they chose blindness in preference to guidance. (*Fussilat*: 17) This means that He gave them clear indication as to what the straight path is, but they, preferred to be kept blind and misguided rather than to accept guidance. As a result, Allah withheld His aid and facilitation from them.

Allah addresses His Messenger, *peace and blessings upon him*, using two patterns to highlight each form of guidance. In one instance, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* tells him that he (Muhammad) cannot guide the ones whom he loves, but it is Allah who guides whom He wills. (*al-Qasas*: 56) So, Allah negates the ability of Muhammad, *peace and blessings upon him*, to provide the guidance of aid and facilitation, because this guidance is not in his possession to give.

In another verse Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* tells him that he (Muhammad) gives guidance to the straight path. (*ash-Shura*: 52) This last verse establishes that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* can give the guidance of clarification since this is the core of his role as a conveyor of Allah's message. In this manner, Allah establishes one form of guidance for His messenger and negates the other since both forms are different and separate. Like when Allah says that most people do not know, but they know the outer crust of this life. (*ar-Rum*: 6-7) So, Allah negates their knowledge and in the following sentence He affirms it. What Allah is saying here is that they have no knowledge of the essence life, but that their knowledge is only about the ostensible crust of life. We must keep repeating these meanings so as to instil them in the hearts and souls of those with a religious turn of mind, so they can benefit from them.

Yet, in another instance the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells prophet Muhammad that it was not him who killed them (when he threw sand at them), but it was Allah who did. (*al-Anfal*: 17) In this verse, Allah is establishing one type of 'throwing' and negating another!

Nevertheless, when the source of the speech is infinitely wise and profoundly adept at conveying His message, you should immediately conclude that what is being established is different from that which is being negated. The fact is that Muhammad, *peace and blessings upon him*, during the Battle of Badr, took a handful of dust and flung it at his adversaries. This is the 'throwing' that is established by the verse. Then again, it was Allah's divine power that enabled the molecules of that dust to reach the eyes of the His adversaries; affecting their vision and impacting their ability to fight. This is then the 'throwing' that the True Lord *Glorified is He* negates as being the action of Muhammad, *peace and blessings upon him*.⁽¹⁾

To be able to comprehend this issue more profoundly, consider the following analogy: Imagine that you are pushing your son to study hard and diligently, so he gets his books, sets them in front of him and skims through them to create the impression that he is reading hard. However, when you review the content with him you find that he has not retained anything that he read. You might say to him, 'You studied, but you really did not study.' In saying this, you have established and negated that he studied. Why? Because technically he did study—if what is meant by that is that he opened the books and skimmed through them—but he did not study in the sense of actively retaining any of what he read.

As such, the True Lord *Glorified is He* guides all people in the sense that He directs them to the straight path and clarifies its contents. On the other hand,

(1) *Concerning the events that surrounded the occasion of this verse being revealed, Wahidi An-Nisaburi mentioned (p. 133): 'Most of the people who specialize in Quranic exegesis maintain that the verse was revealed in reference to the occasion upon which prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him took some of the dirt and pebbles from the valley (of Badr) on the day of the battle and said to the idolaters: 'You will meet dishonor'. He then hurled the handful of dirt he had taken at them. There was not a single disbeliever whose eye was not affected by at least a particle of the dust. See also the different narrations of this account in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur by As-Suyuti (4/40-41).*

He specifically guides the believers with the guidance of aid and facilitation to successfully assume the responsibilities that come along with the straight path. Therefore, Allah tells us in various instances in the Quran that He increases the guidance of those who follow the right path, and gives them awareness of Him. (*Muhammad*: 17) He also tells us that He does not bestow His guidance upon the evildoers. (*as-Saff*: 7) He rather guides those who are committed to righteousness.

He also states that He does not bestow His guidance on the iniquitous. (*as-Saff*: 5) Again, the opposite is true, He guides the obedient. Nor does He guide the people who refuse to acknowledge the truth. (*al-Baqara*: 264) Once more, the opposite is true, He guide the believers.

So, throughout the text of the Quran, Allah reveals, in a number of styles, those whom He guides. Conversely, he who chooses disbelief and does not make belief his long-term goal shall reap what he has sown, not just that, but Allah will increase him in his disbelief and set a seal upon his heart. This is the reality that is being established when Allah tells us that He shall leave them to flounder in their obstinacy. (*al-An'am*: 110)

Now, let us return to the verse we're currently reviewing: 'anyone Allah guides is truly guided...' (*al-Isra'*: 97). The word 'anyone' also meaning 'he whom', or the Arabic term (*man*)—is a relative pronoun which means: he who (does such and such action). Nevertheless, the word *man* is not limited to being a relative pronoun denoting only the masculine/singular form. On the contrary, it can equally be employed to denote any number of people regardless of gender; some of whom would more precisely be expressed in their own individual pronoun forms as: 'she who', 'those two men who', 'those two women who', 'all of them who', and 'all of those women who.' Thus, you would say: 'Whoever man comes to you, be hospitable.' The usage of *man* here has the broad applicability we just mentioned. So, even though the pronoun *man* is used, it can still encompass one man, two men, more than two men, or one woman, two women or more than two women... etc.

So, *man* here can have six implications; singular for both genders, two for both genders, and plural for both genders; in relation to the verse, 'anyone Allah guides is truly guided...' (*al-Isra'*: 97). That is why we say: 'And she

whom Allah guides, she alone has found the right way' and 'And they whom Allah guides, they alone have found the right way' and so forth.

This leads us to ask: If this is so, why does the word *man* denote the masculine/singular form particularly, especially when addressing a matter as critical as guidance? In fact, when addressing the issue of misguidance, the word *man* is also used, but it denotes the masculine/plural. The answer is this: True, this does highlight that the word *man* was used in the first instance to denote the singular form, and in the second the plural, like in the verse where Allah tells us that we will find no protector other than Him for anyone He leads astray. (*al-Isra'*: 97) This is a fine point of interpretation and it requires reflecting profoundly. When discussing guidance, the singular form is used because the path of guidance is only one: it has no alternatives. It is the Way of Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* and His straight path. It was actually this that prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessings upon him*, was referring to when he said: {None of you truly believes until even his whims are in accordance with what I've conveyed.}⁽¹⁾

On the other hand, when addressing misguidance, the plural form is used because the paths of misguidance are numerous and the ways to misguidance are numerous. In other words, there are innumerable ways to be misguided! This is clearly what is being indicated in the statement of the True Lord *Glorified is He* when He tells us that this is His Path leading straight, so we must follow it, and not follow the other ways which will lead us away from it. He further tells us that this is what He commands us to do, so we may refrain from wrongdoing. (*al-An'am*: 153)

Indeed, on one occasion prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessings upon him*, read this verse and drew a visual diagram to illustrate its meaning. He drew a line on the sand for his Companions to see it. After this, he drew many other lines right and left (from the straight line); once done, he pointed at the straight line and said, {This represents what I and my companions are upon.}⁽²⁾

(1) Narrated by Ibn Abu 'Asim in a book titled 'As-Sunna' (1/12) from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr Ibn Al-'As Allah be pleased with him and cited by Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali in *Jami' Al-'uhum Wal-Hikam* (p.460): The latter did mention that the Hadith contained some weakness.

(2) Narrated on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud Allah be pleased with him who said: {the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him drew a line in the sand with his hand=

In short, guidance is represented by one path, while misguidance is not limited to a specific number of paths. For this reason, when you analyse the people of misguidance, you find them so disparate because the paths of misguidance that they have chosen differed. What's more is that each path of misguidance among them has its own unique characteristics. It is important that you read this verse very carefully and thoughtfully so that you can recognize the intent of its Author *Glorified is He*. If someone reads this verse without reflecting profoundly, he might conclude that the guided people will not find anyone to protect them but Allah, as well as the misguided people too, i.e. leading himself to believe that Allah's guidance includes both.

But the Quran is very meticulous in each 'stop' it makes and in each letter it 'mentions'. And since the message is delivered by the Divine, then every single character is strategically placed. The word 'protector' refers to anyone who can assist them or aid them, and 'other than Him' should be taken to mean; no one can protect them from Allah after it has been determined that He is not their helper or protector.

Next, we come to, '...On the Day of Resurrection We shall gather them, lying on their faces...' (*al-Isra'*: 97). The Arabic word *hashr* refers here to the event of rising from the graves and being brought together for reckoning. Interestingly, the phrase 'lying on their faces' has perplexed many of prophet Muhammad's Companions. They asked him: How can a human being walk on his face? He answered: {Indeed, the One who has given them the ability to walk on two legs is capable of giving them the ability to walk on their faces.}⁽¹⁾

= and then said, 'This is the straight path of Allah.' Then, he drew some lines to the right and left and said, 'these are paths that are worth nothing. In fact, there is not a path among these except that there is a devil sitting upon it and inviting to it.' Afterward, he recited: 'This is My path, leading straight, so follow it, and do not follow other ways: they will lead you away from it...' (*al- An'am*: 153)} This was narrated by Ahmad in his *Musnad* (1/465) and *Al-Hakim* in his *Mustadrak* (2/318). The latter said: 'It had a sound chain of transmission but Imams *Al-Bukhari* and *Muslim* declined to narrate it.' *Ibn Hibban* also narrated it (1741—*Mawarid Az-zam'an*)

(1) On the authority of *Abu Hurayra*: {Indeed, the Messenger of Allah said peace and blessings be upon him 'When people are brought forth from the graves, they will be of three types: Some walking, some riding, and some on their faces.' The Companions responded, 'O Messenger of Allah, how can they come on their faces?' At this, the Messenger of=

In so much sense, there is nothing really amazing about this: We do see many examples of this among Allah's creatures, and He tells us the in the Quran that among his creatures are those which crawl on their bellies, others walk on two legs and others walk on four... (*an-Nur*: 45). You must have surely seen a snake? How does it slither so quickly and smoothly? Certainly, Allah (who created such a creature) is capable of making those who choose misguidance walk on their stomach on the Day of Judgment. After all this is an uncontested will of a Creator who desires to lower them to the absolute depths of debasement and lowliness. However, they would be better off if this was the extent of their debasement and lowliness because indeed Allah says that He shall gather them on that day lying on their faces; blind, dumb and deaf. (*al-Isra'*: 97)

This reveals the forms Allah will employ to debase them: So, in addition to walking on their faces, they will be blind, which means that they will be unable to see anything or find their way. Combine their blindness with deafness—which means that they will be unable to hear the call that will be issued on that day—and dumb so they will not be able speak while going through this harrowing experience. Now, I want you to imagine a human being with these various handicaps combined. Once you have completed the mental picture of that individual, consider the fact that he is not simply experiencing these states on a normal day, but he is experiencing them on the Day of Resurrection. How would you assess the amount of terror that he will inevitably be filled with when the Resurrection commences suddenly? In the scenario that we have been elaborating, nearly all his senses have been reduced to nothing. This means that he is amidst pandemonium, without being able to have access to the assuring power of his senses which could have helped him acquire some equilibrium.

Here, we would like to mention an interesting insight concerning this verse. In many places throughout the Quran, we see 'deaf and dumb' occurring in this very order when being used as adjectives. Nonetheless, we observe an

= Allah responded: 'Indeed, the One who has given them the ability to walk on their feet is capable of giving them the ability to walk on their faces.'} This Hadith was narrated on the authority of Ahmad in His Musnad (2/254, 363) and by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (3142). The latter deemed the Hadith 'good.'

exception to this general rule within this verse which mentions 'dumb' before 'deaf'. Logically, deafness precedes dumbness because the human being can only repeat what he hears, so if he hears nothing he will naturally utter nothing. Hence, we say that speech is the outcome of hearing; it is a social feature rather than being contingent to genre or race.

Previously, we mentioned that an English child who is raised in an Arabic speaking environment will inevitably grow-up speaking Arabic and vice-versa. This is because language essentially, has very little to do with race. It is a social feature established within individuals based on what they hear as they grow up. The equation can be summarized as such: The tongue simply utters what the ears hear. Even the Arab, who is raised in an Arabic speaking environment without being exposed to the peculiar pronunciations and meanings of some Arabic dialects, will not be able to imitate those sounds or understand their meanings.

Yet, within the verse that we are currently reviewing, dumbness precedes deafness; why? Indeed, when this person is taken unaware by the terror of resurrection, the first thing he would be expected to do is ask about what is taking place, after which he would want to listen intently to find out what is going on. But in his case he will be taken by surprise and gripped with terror and he will not even be able to enquire about what is taking place around him. Thus, dumbness precedes deafness in this situation.

Some orientalist and those who hew closely to them (i.e. those who have ostensibly accepted Islam, and Allah knows what is in their hearts) have raised an objection here. They say: The Quran says in this verse that they will be resurrected on their faces and blind which means they will not be able to see. However, in another verse Allah says that when they 'behold' the torment they were warned of, (*Maryam*: 75), and in yet another place, He says the sinful people will behold the fire and will know that they are bound to fall in it (*al-Kahf*: 53). So, these two verses suggest that they will be given sight, so how do we reconcile these two verses with the one we are discussing now?

Anyone who carefully examines the state of those being punished—on the day of Resurrection will realize that the blindness (along with the other loss of senses mentioned in this verse) is specifically associated with the moment of

their actual rising. That is to say: they will rise from the graves in a state of blindness so confused and bewildered, hence intensifying their humiliation and disgrace. Afterward, they will be ushered to the place of their reckoning and their sight will be restored so they can see the various punishments that have been designated especially for them. In this way, Allah has given them utter humiliation in both states: sight and blindness.

This explains why Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says in another verse that He will lift from the unmindful their veil (on Judgment Day) and their sight will be so sharp. (*Qaf*: 22) He also says that Hell will be their home, whenever the fire goes down, He shall make it blaze more fiercely. (*al-Isra'*: 97) Their home (as it appears in the verse) is their ultimate abode and destination. As for the word (goes down), it refers to the weakening of the fire. However, this begs the question: If the purpose of the fire is to punish, why does it weaken at all? Would this not constitute their being given a reprieve from punishment? One who carefully ponders this verse finds that the weakening of the fire is a type of punishment. For indeed, something which remains constant allows the one engaged with it to grow accustomed to it. Thus, constancy and perpetuity within punishment gives way to familiarity. On the other hand, if the fire dies down a bit, they will get their hopes high thinking their punishment is near the end, but once the fire roars to life again their hopes will be smashed and they will start yet another round of punishment. If truth be told, this mode of punishment is more agonizing and painful for them.

In terms of Arabic rhetoric this process is referred to as: Despair after fulfilment. An example of this is seen in the poet's words:

Dealing with Layla, the following day,
I had become like someone trying to grasp water,
Only to find that he had been betrayed,
By the very spaces between his fingers.

Despair after fulfilment can also be seen in prisons and detention cells. You will see a prisoner being pushed to unbearable levels of thirstiness till he will scream out to the guard and start beseeching him for a glass of water. The guard would then bring him a glass of water and virtually place it upon his

lips. The prisoner's desire for the water is so heightened at this point, he just wants to wet his palate and quench the burning sensation in his throat. Then the guard spills the water on the floor, and this will be a most antagonizing and irritating form of punishment (for prisoners). A poet⁽¹⁾ has expressed this meaning beautifully in the following words:

It is similar to how a cloud taunts a thirsty person with lightning

As he begins to ask for rain, it dissipates and the sun breaks through⁽²⁾

As soon as he saw it, his hopes got high that the cloud would be a source of water. Consequently, when the cloud dissipated his hopes dissipated along with it.

Another example of a punishment that some think is a type of mercy for Hell dwellers, may Allah protect us from it, is the fact that Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* will renew their skins for new skins (after they have been charred). This is not an act of mercy, but indeed an intensification of their punishment. Allah says that every time their skins are burnt off, He shall provide them with new skin so they might taste the suffering in full. (*an-Nisa'*: 56) In fact, when the skin and the underlying nerves get burnt out completely they will stop feeling anything—as a result—so they will be spared from tasting their punishment. Hence, their skins are renewed to reinitiate their sense of pain and thus, experience perpetual punishment. Not long ago, people used to think that sensation stemmed exclusively from the brain; only they noticed later that human beings could sense things even before any signals reached the brain.

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- (1) The unidentified poet is Kathir ibn 'Abd Ar-Rahman Al-Khaza'i Abu Sakhr. He is a famous poet of Tamimi extraction. He was originally from the people of Medina but spent most of his life in Egypt. His correspondences with 'Izza bint Hamil Ad-Damariyya were abundant; indeed, she was very dear to him. He died in 105 A.H. (Al-A'alam 5/219, Az-Zirikli)
- (2) This verse was composed by Kathir 'Izza. See also his Diwan (p.107) published by Dar At-Thaqafa, Beirut 1971, edited by Ihsan 'Abbas. Shihab Ad-Din Mahmud Al-Halabi (d. 725 A.H.) in his book entitled '*Husn At-Tawassul ila Sana'at At-Tarassul*' which was edited by Akram 'Uthman Yusuf (P. 121). The latter said: his mention of 'how a cloud taunts a thirsty people with lightning' is not simply a parable. If truth be told, the poet's objective is to describe how the start of yearning leads to the end of despair.

For example, if you pointed your finger near someone else's eye, you would see him blink before you even touch him. They call this action 'cranial reflex'. In subsequent years, researches were directed toward gaining more knowledge about the place where sensation starts in the human being. In the end, these studies reached what the Quran had informed us about more than fourteen hundred years ago. Namely, that the epidermis is the main hub of sensation within the human being. For instance, when you go to take an injection, the minute the needle penetrates the top layer of your skin you will not feel it as it pricks through the lower layers.

How could the Arabs have known about these intricate scientific theories? Who could have informed Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessings upon him*, about them? Indeed, this is one of the many (universally recognized) miraculous aspects of the Quran; its inimitability can be recognized by Arabs as well as non-Arabs.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

ذَٰلِكَ جَزَاؤُهُمْ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَقَالُوا أَإِذَا كُنَّا
عِظْمًا وَرُفَاتًا أَءَنَّا لَمَبْعُوثُونَ خَلْقًا جَدِيدًا ﴿٩٨﴾

**This is what they will get for rejecting Our signs and saying,
'What? When we are turned to bones and dust, how can we be
raised in a new act of creation?' [98] (The Quran, *al-Isra*: 98)**

The demonstrative pronoun (this) which appears in the verse refers to the punishment of whose repulsiveness you have just learned. The phrase '...what they will get for...' refers to the chastisement that will consume them deservedly, not unjustly. Upon hearing the verses that deal with punishment—like these—by no means should you be moved with compassion or sympathy towards the wrongdoers. To be sure, they are only being requited for their deeds, stubbornness, and ultimately disobedience. The postponement of penalties is indeed the very thing that makes people sympathize with the wrongdoers.

There is a difference—in terms of public response—when justice is meted out shortly after the commission of a crime because the vileness of the crime committed is still fresh in the minds of the public and its fire is still blazing in

their hearts. If you punish a criminal within this timeframe, the punishment will serve some end and the desired result can accrue from it. Most importantly, the public will sympathize with the victim more than the criminal. But when we delay meting out justice, and get entangled in a medley of legal proceedings that may extend for years, undoubtedly, the crime will be forgotten and the initial alarm that it set off within the public will subside. Indeed, the very vileness of the crime, that at first outraged them, will become as if it never happened. In short, the entire occurrence of the crime will have become obscured. In this case, when you punish a criminal, after a long time has elapsed, all that the public will remember is the affliction of the punishment (with the crime totally forgotten) and hence they will sympathize with the criminal.

So, before you think of their skins which will be charred and renewed, (*an-Nisa'*: 56), and before you think of how they will be resurrected blind, dumb and deaf on Judgment Day (*al-Isra'*: 97), you must remember and consider what they have done. Then learn that the punishment they are receiving is of Allah's justice. Hence, do not feel sorry for them, and this is what Allah tells us in the chapter of *an-Nur* about the punishment He prescribed for adultery. Allah tells us outright not to have any compassion standing between us and carrying out the law of Allah, if we truly believe in Him, and that a group of the believers must witness their chastisement. (*an-Nur*: 2)

Allah *Glorified is He* shows us the pretext for this punishment: 'This is what they will get for rejecting Our signs...' (*al-Isra'*: 98). Again, the word 'signs' encompasses all the wonders within creation, all the miracles that are manifest on the hands of prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessings upon him*, and which serve as proof of his truthfulness, and it also includes the Quranic verses which contain rulings. Hence, the disbelievers have disbelieved in all these aforementioned categories. This means that they disbelieved in the wonders of creation, and did not allow these wonders to let them contemplate about the Creator, nor did they reflect upon the wisdom underlying all His wonders. In the same way, they rejected the verses of the Quran, and they did not believe in what they came with.

All of this indicates their disbelief and the faults that exist in their natural dispositions and inclinations. In a similar fashion, they also rejected the

miracles of the Messengers *peace be upon them*. This indicates that these disbelievers were unable to recognize the truth when presented to them.

One of their expressions of disbelief was their saying: 'If we become bones and dust, shall we, forsooth, be raised from the dead in a new act of creation?' (*al-Isra'*: 98). This statement is a flagrant rejection of the verses of the Quran. The Quran was conveyed by Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* to inform them that they would be raised and held accountable for their actions on the Day of Judgment. With this statement they shifted the debate in a new direction, discussing the issue of resurrection after death.

They used the words: '...bones (*'izham*) and dust (*rufat*),' (*al-Isra'*: 98). The Arabic word *rufat* mentioned in this verse corresponds to the Arabic word *futat* (crumbs or fragments) both in its meaning and linguistic pattern. This explains why the word, 'bones,' was mentioned before the word, 'dust,' as the word 'dust' here refers to 'decrepit bone fragments'. Indeed, when a human corpse decomposes and the soil eats away at the skin, the only thing that remains is the bones. However, with the passage of time, these bones also begin to break down, crumble, and turn into dust. This is precisely why the disbelievers regarded the concept of resurrection after death as farfetched, because it would occur after their corpses had transformed into bones and then dust.

They also said: '...shall we (*a'ena*), forsooth, be raised from the dead,' (*al-Isra'*: 98). The Arabic word *a'ena* ('shall we') starts with a *hamza* (*a'*). Conventionally, the Arabic *hamza* is used to convey an interrogative meaning, but here, it additionally indicates contempt and doubt. Why have the disbelievers treated the matter of resurrection after death with doubt and uncertainty?

Our answer is that the disbelievers certainly suffer from imbalances which affect their natural inclination towards faith (that Allah *Glorified is He* has placed inside all human beings). It serves their lies and false hopes, towards the Hereafter, to reject the issue of resurrection. Even when they suppose that this resurrection will take place, they assume that their position as leaders in this worldly life will secure their status in the Hereafter. These people's understanding of the world is limited to the outer appearances of creation. As far as they are concerned, life is essentially made up of the perceptible

phenomena and the other transactions in which they engage. Thus, they live their lives according to this shallow understanding, without realizing that everything in life has uniquely suited and changing phases.

For example, geologists and palaeontologists say, 'The constituents that are concealed within the earth change with the passage of time. They transform into other forms of matter'. This means that these constituents experience phases for which they are uniquely suited. Life is broader than the outward transactions that we engage in during our existence in this world. In fact, life has a wider encompassing reality than anyone can apprehend.

An example of these varying phases, which created beings are subjected to, can be seen in the states of human consciousness. These are the states of sleep and wakefulness. The portion of life that the brain spends in sleep is governed by certain natural laws, while the existence of the brain in a wakeful state is governed by different natural laws. Despite these different phases of the brain, the body remains alive in both states. In light of this, when we inform you that your death is governed by laws that you are not aware of, and for that matter, your resurrection after death also has distinct laws, this is indeed a plausible statement.

A sleeping person witnesses dreams and altered perceptions despite his senses being concealed from the outside world. He may even precisely narrate certain events, occurrences, and spectacles that he saw in his dreams and state that he assumed he was awake during these occurrences. A person who has lost their sense of sight can also witness dreams and can narrate them with high precision and clarity. People can experience such lucid dreams because sleep is governed by its distinct laws. Dreams are perceived through other sense neurons than those organs that customarily perceive the external life's events. Your life asleep is independent and different from your life when you are awake. In fact, two people may be sleeping in one place. One of them might be witnessing a joyful dream, while the other person is experiencing a horrific and saddening nightmare. Neither of them is able to perceive or feel the presence of their mate's dream. Indeed, each one of them is experiencing an independent and specific realm of existence which is not shared with anyone else.

You might witness a dream in a few seconds that would take you thirty minutes to narrate to one of your friends. Scientists who specialize in sleep medicine have concluded that the mind can make up a dream in a few seconds, as if the time spent in sleeping is 'suspended' and the traditional media that are normally used to perceive the world are stopped. Therefore, when you fall asleep, your life is different from the time you spend when you are awake. The same can be said about resurrection after death, which is another phase of your life, after the life of this world. Each of these stages of existence is governed by laws that are particularly suited for it.

Some minds may consider dreams to be simple figments of the imagination that do not correspond to any reality. However, we may observe that some people do have dreams that cast doubt on to this notion. For instance, a person may have a dream in which they had some food. After they wake up, they report having the taste of the food in their mouths. Another person sees a dream where he has been beaten. Then, after waking up, proceeds to show you the marks on his back where the wounds should be. Others rise from sleep drenched in sweat as though they were in actual fights and not merely dreaming of a quarrel or a struggle. This does not prove that all dreams are real, but rather shows that some dreams, by the will of Allah, can prove to be very tangible upon waking. And that dreams are meant to be a sign for the believers.

Allah *Glorified is He* wants to clarify a concept to us through the phenomenon of sleep. During sleep, each one of us has a special life that is governed by its own set of laws. These laws are distinct from the natural laws of this world. Our minds should find this as an indication and a sign that another life after death is a plausible phenomenon.

Many scholars have concluded that this phenomenon is part of an uninterrupted and regressive series. The wakeful state consists of strict physical laws. Existence in a state of sleep is made up of laws that are more subtle and delicate than those that govern our existence in the wakeful state. Therefore, it is natural for us to conclude that death is governed by laws that are subtler than those that govern sleep. Following the same pattern, resurrection may be governed by laws that are simpler than those that govern death.

The Quran has conclusively decided upon this matter, as Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Everything is bound to perish, except His (Allah's) (eternal) Self,' (*al-Qasas*: 88). Every item or entity in existence that could legitimately be referred to as a thing is bound to perish, except Allah *Glorified is He* as indeed, Allah is the Everlasting Power. Perishing is the opposite of being alive. Allah *Glorified is He* said: '...that those who perished (through disbelief) would perish upon evidence and those who lived (in faith) would live upon evidence; and indeed, Allah is Hearing and Knowing,' (*al-Anfal*: 42). Therefore, everything has a specially suited modality of living. Before those things perish, they must live in accordance with that modality.

For this reason, we are genuinely amazed when scientists teach us that a simple box of matches contains sufficient forces in its atoms that can power a train's journey for a long time. Glory be to Allah *Glorified is He*. This energy is stored in atoms, but we are simply unable to detect its presence. Only astute researchers of science can be able to observe and record these phenomena. Another example of this concept is the phenomenon of magnetism which can lead iron filings to move when a magnetic rod is passed over them. There is a form of existence, present among the atoms of the iron filings, that has reached a precision undetectable by human beings.

Therefore, we can say that the bones and their remaining fragments have an existence of their own. Thus, sceptics should realize that they will continue to have an existence even when they become dust. Even in that state, you will be a part of their physical existence, from which they can reconstitute another existence. There is another question that confronts the logic of these people, who are sceptical of resurrection. 'Which is a more plausible concept: resurrecting the remnants of a former creation or creating these bodies from nothingness to start with?'

Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* responded to them in His statement: 'We know how the earth consumes their bodies, for with us is a record unfailing,' (*Qaf*: 4). Allah *Glorified is He* knows, without fail, the precise number of atoms that constitute our bodies and can re-configure these atoms once more after our bones crumble. He knows the detailed record of everything in existence and none of these details escape His knowledge or Power.

Allah *Glorified is He* also said, rebuking the claims of the sceptics: 'Could we, then, be (thought of as being) worn out by the first creation? Nay – but some people are (still) lost in doubt about (the possibility of) a new creation,' (*Qaf*: 15). These people are truly lost in bewilderment, doubt, and hesitation.

Indeed, we have debated some communist atheists who denied the concept of resurrection. These were communists who had killed their enemies and usurped their money as a revengeful punishment for the wrong and transgression that their enemies had committed towards them. I kept asking them, 'What about your enemies who died before you could punish them for their wrongdoing?' Surely, these people did not receive their proper share of punishment in this world. How can they escape from this punishment if they are guilty of so much wrongdoing? The Hereafter is the place where those who were able to escape worldly requital will be punished for their misdeeds. This must take place in order for the balance of justice to be established.

They said: '...shall we, forsooth, be raised from the dead,' (*al-Isra'*: 98). They disregarded being resurrected after death as a far-fetched theory. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* said, in tolerant response to them: 'And it is He who creates (all life) in the first instance, and then brings it forth anew, and most easy is this for Him,' (*ar-Rum*: 27). Restoring the life of something that once existed is an easier and more simplistic task than creating something into existence from nothing.

The discussion here pertains to the bodily resurrection of the human being. This is a creature that has been brought into existence by Allah *Glorified is He* who made him a master in this earth and has made his years limited. Why are some people adamant about rejecting the resurrection of human beings, neglecting Allah's Power over all the other created things?

Many of these created forms are older and greater in their material magnitudes than human beings are (i.e. the Mountains and Stars). Before they deny the resurrection of human beings after they have become dust, they should look at the more momentous and stunning objects within creation. Despite their immensity, these entities are submissive and obedient to Allah *Glorified is He* without any resistance or objection. Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Greater indeed than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the earth,' (*Ghafir*: 57).

Thus, those who reject the resurrection of human beings (after they become dust and bones) should consider the magnitude of the sun. It was created by Allah *Glorified is He* before the creation of human beings and it will remain until Allah *Glorified is He* wills otherwise. The sun consistently emits light and warmth without interruption, impairment, or failure. It does not need to be serviced nor have its parts replaced. This force of nature moving about in its orbit has been subjected by the Power of the Creator to your service. What does recreating human beings amount to when compared to the Power of the Creator *Glorified is He*?

Allah said:

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّ اللَّهَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ قَادِرٌ عَلَىٰ أَنْ يَخْلُقَ
مِثْلَهُمْ وَجَعَلَ لَهُمْ أَجَلًا لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ فَأَبَى الظَّالِمُونَ إِلَّا كُفُورًا ﴿٩٩﴾

Do they not see that God, who created the heavens and earth, can create the likes of them [anew]? He has ordained a time for them – there is no doubt about that – but the evildoers refuse every- thing except disbelief [99]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 99)

Allah *Glorified is He* said in this verse: ‘Did they not see (‘*awalam yaraw*) that Allah, who has created the heavens and the earth, has the power to create them anew in their own (original) likeness,’ (*al-Isra'*: 99). When we encounter the Arabic *hamza* (‘*a*), which is used as an interrogative particle, followed by the Arabic character *wa*, which is used for attaching independent clauses and items within a sentence, we can be assured that the sentence contains a word or phrase that has been omitted. In this case, the words, ‘Did they not see,’ in the verse can be translated as, ‘Did they (deny resurrection and) not see?’ Thus, the verse is asking the question, ‘Can they not see that Allah *Glorified is He* who is responsible for the creation of the heavens and the earth, is capable of creating their likes?’

Allah’s words, ‘...in their own likeness,’ indicate that He will recreate them, once more, in their former states. Indeed, the act of creation entails a new construction. Some scholars interpreted the verse that they will be created in their old forms. Another interpretation is that they will be given a

different form that only has the same likeness. The second interpretation may have more weight because their new forms will have no free will in the Hereafter compared to the life of this world where they had free will. In the Hereafter, they will only be compelled to obey Allah's Commands. This is because the Creator will announce on the Day of Judgment: 'With whom will sovereignty rest on this Day? With Allah, the One Who holds absolute sway over all that exists,' (*Ghafir*: 16).

Allah *Glorified is He* said in this verse: '...having beyond any doubt, set a term for their resurrection? However, all (such) evildoers are unwilling to accept anything but disbelief!' (*al-Isra*': 99) They flagrantly rejected standing before Allah in this world. In the Hereafter, it will be an indisputable reality. However, these individuals are stubborn disbelievers, no matter the form of evidence or parables you present to them. They have turned a deaf ear to guidance, as accepting faith will decrease their worldly power and their self-proclaimed majesty. Indeed, (accepting faith) would make them equal to their slaves and restrict their free enjoyment of moral corruption and misguidance.

Those leaders and notables rejected faith and scoffed at the idea of resurrection after death, out of fear for their rank, position, and temporal authority. We can pose the following question to them, 'Have you not experienced oppression at someone's hand? Has anyone not ever transgressed against you or stolen wealth from you without being apprehended or punished?' Indeed, it is more fitting to believe in the Hereafter which is the place where punishment and recompense are realized. There, you will receive indemnity from all of those who have wronged you

In the following verse, the Quranic context shifted our attentions to a new issue. Allah *Glorified is He* said:

قُلْ لَوْ أَنْتُمْ تَمْلِكُونَ خَزَائِنَ رَحْمَةِ رَبِّي إِذَا
لَأَمْسَكْتُمْ خَشْيَةَ الْإِنْفَاقِ ۚ وَكَانَ الْإِنْسَانُ قَتُورًا ﴿١٠٠﴾

**Say, 'If you possessed the very stores of my Lord's bounty,
you would hold them back in your fear of spending: man is
ever grudging' [100] (The Quran, *al-Isra*': 100)**

This is a command from Allah *Glorified is He* to His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* to convey this

proclamation to his community. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* demonstrated his faithfulness in conveying the message of the Quran, as he conveyed every word in the message, including the word, 'Say,' and did not omit any part of the text he received from Allah *Glorified is He*. This displays the depth of Prophet Muhammad's commitment to convey the message of his Lord.

Treasuries are places where precious worthy riches are stored for a specific period of time. The phrase, '...treasuries of my Lord's Mercy,' is a reference to the benevolent divine bounties in the world, from the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* until the establishment of the Final Hour. These bounties exist in Allah's treasuries, whether they are already manifested in this world or will still be manifested. Allah *Glorified is He* said: '...and We only bestow (bounties) in accordance with a measure well-defined,' (*al-Hijr*: 21) Therefore, these bounties are present within the knowledge of Allah *Glorified is He* until there is need for them. This explains why Allah *Glorified is He* spoke about the created signs in the heavens and the earth in the following terms: 'Say, "Do you indeed disbelieve in Him who has created the earth in two days and claim that there are powers that could rival Him, the Lord of all the worlds?" For it is He who (after creating the Earth) placed firm mountains on it, (towering) above its surface, bestowed blessings on it and equitably apportioned its means of subsistence to all who would seek it: (and all this He created) in four aeons,' (*Fussilat*: 9-10). Allah *Glorified is He* said, '...bestowed blessings on it...' after mentioning the firmly established mountains. Then He said, '...and equitably apportioned its means of subsistence....,' (*Fussilat*: 10). It is as if the mountains are the storehouses of sustenance and divine mercy to the people of the earth. Sustenance is the livelihood that grows out of the earth's vegetation upon which individuals seek to maintain their lives. Thus, the Quran informed us that the elements that make up the human being are the very same elements that make up the farmable soil from which we eat.

However, how can mountains be considered treasure houses of sustenance that were placed by Allah *Glorified is He* on this earth before the creation of human beings? Our answer is that the mountains are a primary source of the soil that we use in farming. Mountains may appear as solid inflexible masses

of rock, but the reality of their composition is somewhat different. The alternating forces of climate change, such as the sunlight and the cold breezes, break down the hard mountainous rocks into sediments and soil deposits. These deposits are carried by the falling rainwater to form silt in the nearby valleys. Therefore, mountains and valleys have complementary shapes, with the mountainous tops extending toward the sky and the valleys possessing a cavernous topography. The mountains lose their composition and this matter is added to the rich soils of the valleys. Ultimately, this forms the farmable topsoil which we refer to as *ghareen* (alluvion) and *tami* (silt).

We were informed that the city of Damietta, in Egypt, was much nearer to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. However, with the passage of time, vast fields of fertile topsoil were allowed to form due to the Nile River carrying sediments from its sources. As a result, many years ago, the city of Damietta was separated from the sea. Nowadays, owing to the construction of the Aswan High Dam, this build-up of topsoil decreased and the waters of the sea have started eroding the nearby land of Damietta.

Thus, in this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* said concerning the inception of the earth's creation: 'For it is He who (after creating the earth) placed firm mountains on it, (towering) above its surface, bestowed blessings on it and equitably apportioned its means of subsistence to all who would seek it,' (*Fussilat*: 10). This is the chain of events that lead to the creation of sustenance within the earth. Additionally, the verse indicates that the storehouses of Allah *Glorified is He* are unlimited and that they render us bounties without cessation.

Allah *Glorified is He* said in the verse we are studying: 'If you were to own all the treasures of my Lord's Mercy, you would still try to hold on (to them) tightly for fear of spending (too much): for man has always been greedy,' (*al-Isra'*: 100). If Allah *Glorified is He* granted human beings ownership of the treasures which contain His endless bounties and mercy, human beings would still display stinginess, niggardliness, and avarice. The natural disposition of human beings is continuous fear of poverty. They hold their hands from spending generously because they are afraid of their incapacity to replace these expenditures and their inability to exert their future desires.

The Arabic word *bukhl* (stinginess) is used when the person withholds spending their money on other people. On the other hand, if people withhold spending money on themselves, the Arabic word is *taqteer* (miserliness) which is a particularly disgraceful and despicable trait. It is conceivable that a person might withhold his resources from someone else, but the idea that a person would withhold his resources from himself is the most extreme form of avarice.

For this reason, an Arabic poet⁽¹⁾ said the following verses, in ridicule of one such miserable person:

‘Isa is stingy upon himself, despite the fact that he is a mortal,
If he could avoid such a spending, he would just breathe out of one nostril.’
The same poet also said the following verses about another miser:
‘Indeed, O son of Yusuf, if your entire house was full of needles,
And your father wanted a needle to mend his garment, you would not lend it.’

Many human beings display vicious love of wealth by withholding their resources from others and themselves. The principal reason for this avarice is the fear of poverty, even if they were granted the endless treasures of the heavens and the earth, Allah *Glorified is He* said in the next verse:

وَلَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَا مُوسَىٰ تِسْعَ ءَايَاتٍ يُبَيِّنُهَا لَٰطِفًا يُفَصِّلُهَا لِلَّذِينَ يَمُنُونَ ۖ لَآ يُرَىٰ فِيهَا شَآءٌ مِّنَ الشَّيْءِ ۚ إِذْ جَاءَهُمْ
فَقَالَ لَهُ فِرْعَوْنُ إِنِّي لَأَظُنُّكَ يَمُوسَىٰ مَسْحُورًا

**In the past, We gave Moses nine clear signs – ask the
Children of Israel. When Moses came to [the Egyptians],
Pharaoh said to him, ‘Moses, I think you are bewitched’ [101]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 101)**

Earlier in this chapter, we saw that the disbelievers of Mecca requested several miracles to believe in Prophet Muhammad’s message. These suggestions were mentioned by Allah *Glorified is He* in the following verses: ‘And so they say,

(1) The poet mentioned above is ibn Ar-Rumi. His proper name is ‘Ali ibn Al-‘Abbas ibn Jurayj Abu Al-Hassan. He was a great poet and a contemporary of Bashar and Al-Mutanabbi. His grandfather was a client of Banu Al-‘Abbas. He was born in Baghdad in the year 221 A.H., in the same city that he was bred. He died there, by poison, during the year 283 A.H. and was 63 years old when he passed away. (The book of ‘Al-‘Aalam’ (4/297) by az-Zirikli).

“(O Muhammad,) we shall not believe you till you cause a spring to gush forth for us from the earth, or you (should) have a garden of date-palms and vines and cause rivers to gush forth in their midst in a sudden rush, or you (should) cause the skies to fall down upon us in fragments, as you have threatened, or (until) you bring Allah and the angels face to face before us, or (until) you have a house (made) of gold, or (until) you ascend to the heavens, but nay, we would not (even) believe in your ascension unless you bring down to us (from the heavens) a written book which we (ourselves) could read” (*al-Isra'*: 90-93).

Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to turn the Arabs' attention to the fact that the Jews were given nine signs before them. These signs descended upon them without their request, but they, nonetheless, rejected these messages. Thus, the point that is being emphasized in this verse is the obstinacy and stubbornness displayed by the people of disbelief in every age and place. Allah *Glorified is He* described these signs and messages that were revealed to the people as clear messages (*bayinnat*). This means that these messages were unmistakable, bright as the light of day and plainly visible to everyone present. These nine signs were intended for Pharaoh because many people mistake the miracles that Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* showed to Pharaoh with the miracles that were shown to the children of Israel. Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘And indeed, We gave to Musa nine clear messages’ (*al-Isra'*: 101). These nine signs sent to Pharaoh and his people included the staff which transformed into a snake, the hand which was withdrawn from the pocket (of Prophet Musa *peace be upon him*) white and illumined, the years of famine, as well as the epidemics and shortages that beset the people of Pharaoh. After they persistently denied Allah's signs, Allah *Glorified is He* unleashed a flood upon them followed by locusts, lice, frogs, and blood. These nine signs were made manifest as a result of the exchange that ensued between Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* and Pharaoh.

There were other miracles revealed to the children of Israel. These included the staff which Prophet Musa used to strike a stone, releasing twelve gushing springs of water, the mountain being raised above the children of Israel as though it were a cloud, as well as the manna and the quails which

were provided for them to eat. All of these miracles were directed solely to the children of Israel.

Allah *Glorified is He* said, 'Ask then the children of Israel..., ' (*al-Isra'*: 101). We find that this command is specifically directed to Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessings be upon him*. How can Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessings be upon him*, direct a question to the children of Israel, to whom Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* was sent, when their generations had passed away a long time ago? Are the Jews not present at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* their distant descendants? The answer is that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* can still ask their descendants this question because the descendants had orally conveyed the accounts of these occurrences, generation after generation. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* addressed the descendants of the children of Israel who were contemporaries of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the following verse: 'And, indeed, Musa spoke (thus) to his people, "Remember the blessings which Allah *Glorified is He* bestowed upon you when He saved you from Pharaoh's people who afflicted you with cruel suffering. They slaughtered your sons and spared only your women. This was an overwhelming trial from your Lord"' (*Ibrahim*: 6).

It was the forefathers living in the time of Pharaoh who were saved, but Allah *Glorified is He* still addressed their descendants with the words, '...when He saved you,' for indeed, if Allah *Glorified is He* had destroyed the forefathers, the descendants would not have existed. Therefore, in essence, the rescue of their forefathers can also be considered their own rescue.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is directing these questions to the children of Israel because they were extensively exposed to Allah's revelations, being inextricably linked to the Messengers and the Revealed Scriptures, such as the Torah and the Gospel. On the other hand, the idolaters of Quraysh had no past attachment to heavenly scriptures. This explains why they denied the message of Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* commanded Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to address the idolaters in the following manner: 'None can bear witness between me and you as Allah does, and (none can bear witness as

does the scholar) who has true knowledge of the Divine Book,' (*ar-Ra'd*: 43). Indeed, the Jews and Christians who have knowledge of the Scripture will have clear signs of the truth of Prophet Muhammad's Message. They will know specific characteristics about him and the precise time of his revelation. One of them even said that they know about his prophecy as much as they know about their own sons.⁽¹⁾

These questions that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* directed to the children of Israel were meant as a verifying testimony to his prophecy. His people had requested various signs to indicate the truth of his message and Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to make them aware of the history of their brothers and predecessors throughout the ages. Allah *Glorified is He* had given these former communities clear signs and eye-opening miracles, but they, nonetheless, persisted in their disbelief.

The people of Pharaoh were shown nine clear signs from Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* but they disbelieved them. Likewise, the people of Prophet Saleh *peace be upon him* were also provided a clear sign. Allah *Glorified is He* said: '...thus, We provided the she-camel as a manifest sign for (the tribe of) Thamud, but they treated it with injustice' (*al-Isra'*: 59). The people of Thamud did not just deny this sign of the she-camel that was miraculously brought forth from a mountain, but they committed a graver sin by murdering it.

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'And We only refrain from sending the signs, only because the men of former generations treated them as false' (*al-Isra'*: 59). Just as the people of previous times had disbelieved in the manifest signs, these people would disbelieve in a similar manner, for indeed, disbelief follows one path throughout the ages.

In addition, most of them are not demanding these signs and miracles with a sincere desire to believe the truth. On the contrary, in many instances their

(1) *Al-Qurtubi said, 'It is narrated on the authority of 'Umar that he himself asked 'Abdullah ibn Salam: "Did you really know Muhammad as you know your own son?" He answered, "Yes, and in fact, I was even surer about Prophet Muhammad than my own son!" He continued, "The most trustworthy of heaven's inhabitants was sent to the most trustworthy of earth's inhabitants. I knew Prophet Muhammad from his description (in previous divine revelation). As for my son, I do not know exactly what his mother was up to!"' (This was mentioned by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir, 1/194).*

demands are being motivated by stubbornness and obstinacy. These are only attempts to fuel controversy and dissension with the aim of debunking the message and passing an enjoyable time.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘Pharaoh said unto him, “Verily, O Musa, I think that you are under the effect of sorcery (*musshoor*),”’ (*al-Isra'*: 101). This happened after Pharaoh had witnessed all the signs, proofs and miracles of Prophet Musa *peace be upon him*. He accused Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* of being a sorcerer!

The word *musshoor* that is used in this verse can be translated as ‘bewitched’. In this instance, Pharaoh is accusing Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* of being a sorcerer and a magician (*sahir*). Why was the word used in this verse *musshoor* (under the effect of sorcery) instead of the word *sahir* (sorcerer or magician)? The reason is that this form of the word (*musshoor*) is used in the Arabic language to place stronger emphasis on the meaning intended.

Another example of this is using the word *mastoor* (veiled or covered) instead of the word *satir* (veiling or covering), to describe Allah’s protecting barrier in the verse: ‘And when you recite the Quran, We place between you and those who do not believe in the hereafter a hidden (*mastoor*) barrier (*hijab*),’ (*al-Isra'*: 45). If the barrier is itself a *satir* (cover), why did Allah *Glorified is He* use the word *mastoor* (covered) to describe it? Again, the reason is that this lexical form of the word expresses the meaning and emphasizes it more effectively. The protective cover is in full thickness, as if its own layers provide cover for each other.

We find another example of this lexical usage in the following verse that described the gardens prepared for the believers as having: ‘...a dense shade (*zhilan zhaleela*),’ (*an-Nisa'*: 57). Indeed, the shade itself will be shaded, with the air being divinely conditioned by Allah to provide a canopy of absolute protection and comfort. We can see a slight glimpse of such shade in this worldly life, when we seek the cover of a leafy tree during intense heat. The air underneath the tree is soothing because the leaves form a lattice that provides a multi-layered cover.

Therefore, we can now understand why the word *musshoor* was used in the verse, “...Verily, O Moses, I think that you are under the effect of sorcery

(*musshoor*)”” (*al-Isra'*: 101). Pharaoh claimed that Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* was bewitched by someone else (*musshoor*), instead of claiming that he was an established sorcerer (*sahir*). This lexical form is a greater emphasis of the meaning that Pharaoh intended in his disbelief, ‘Musa’s signs are not divine, but are only the work of strong magic. Even Musa himself is bewitched!’

As a matter of fact, the idolaters of Mecca used the expression *musshoor* to refer to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They said: ‘...if you were to follow him (Muhammad), you would only be following a man (who is) bewitched (*musshoor*)!’ (*al-Isra'*: 47) In order to support their refutable falsehood, they claimed that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had lost the ability to use the faculties of discernment. Therefore, they used the description *musshoor* to claim that he has gone insane or he was under the influence of sorcery. To answer them, if he were a magician, he would not fall as a victim to someone else’s sorcery. In addition, why was he unable to cast the same spells on them as he appeared to have cast on those who believed in him? How did the disbelievers resist his sorcery and remain steady in their disbelief?

It is also safe to say that if he was mentally ill, he would conform to behaviour commonly expected of people suffering from mental illness. He did not perform any abnormal actions or make involuntary statements and was in complete control of the critical and discerning features of his mind. They had never witnessed any abnormal characteristics in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

In light of this, Allah *Glorified is He* responded to their untruths in His words: ‘Nuun (Allah begins this verse with the Arabic letter Nuun). Consider the pen, and all that they write (therewith)! By the grace of your Lord (O Muhammad), you are not insane! And, most surely, you shall have a reward never to be cut off. And most surely you conform (yourself) to sublime morality and exalted character,’ (*al-Qalam*: 1-4). Indeed, he had an exalted standard of character.

We now return to the verse we are studying. In the end, Pharaoh contradicted himself. After he accused Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* of practicing simple magic, Prophet Musa’s signs triumphed against the acts of Pharaoh’s magicians!

Therefore, these magicians fell in prostration at the truth of the signs of Prophet Musa. At that point, Pharaoh accused his own magicians by claiming, 'Verily, he must be your master who has taught you magic' (*Ta Ha*: 71). This demonstrates the feelings of frustration and loss that Pharaoh must have experienced at that moment, Allah said:

قَالَ لَقَدْ عَلِمْتَ مَا أَنْزَلَ هَؤُلَاءِ إِلَّا رَبُّ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ
بَصَائِرَ وَإِنِّي لَأَظُنُّكَ يَفْرَعُونَ مُشْبُورًا ﴿١٠٢﴾

**He said, 'You know very well that only the Lord of the
heavens and earth could have sent these signs as clear proof.
I think that you, Pharaoh, are doomed' [102]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 102)**

In this verse, Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* addressed Pharaoh directly, rejecting the claims of sorcery or insanity. Moreover, Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* pointed out how Pharaoh clearly knew that these signs he had witnessed were from Allah *Glorified is He* the Lord of the heavens and the earth. Pharaoh was only bent on denying the divine origin of these miracles.

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* described how such thoughts run in disbelievers' minds: 'And in their wickedness and self-exaltation they rejected the (signs), although their minds were convinced of their truth,' (*an-Naml*: 14). Therefore, these disbelievers had absolute certainty in the truth of the miracles they had witnessed, but in spite of this, insisted on rejecting them. The only plausible reason for this rejection is their fear that the truth would shake the foundations of their worldly power and strike the bases of their thrones.

Allah *Glorified is He* described these signs as: '...manifest,' (*al-Isra'*: 102). They were eye-opening signs to convince those who witness their occurrence and open their hearts to faith. On considering these signs, they would be capable of paying attention to their Messenger, who had come with miraculous signs of a similar nature to what his people thought they had excelled at.

Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* did not show any signs of weakness at Pharaoh's disbelief. In fact, his feet became firmer and the roots of his message deepened. In front of all the people, he addressed Pharaoh and challenged

him by saying: 'I think that you (O Pharaoh) are utterly lost (*mathboor*)' (*al-Isra'*: 102). This was in response to Pharaoh's comment: '...O Musa, I think that you are under the effect of sorcery (*musshoor*)' (*al-Isra'*: 101). Thus, the truth of the statement of Musa dealt with Pharaoh's empty words and, Pharaoh, the one who initiated the exchange, was the wrong-doer. The term *mathboor*, which is translated here as 'utterly lost', refers to a person who is miserably ruined that they are prevented from attaining any good. It is possible that Allah *Glorified is He* could have informed Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* of Pharaoh's imminent destruction.

If we compare both exchanges between Pharaoh and Prophet Musa, we will find that being under the effect of insanity or sorcery (*musshoor*) is a milder condition than being utterly lost in misery and estrangement (*mathboor*). A person who is suffering from mental ailment may lose the blessing of sound reasoning, but with proper care, can lead a life fairly similar to those in possession of healthy minds. In appropriate circumstances, this individual might even lead a life that is superior in certain respects. People are generally more forgiving to his sayings and actions. He may even go to great lengths of wrongdoing without the slightest objection or reprimand from others. Indeed, this range of autonomy is always direly desired by the dictators and autocrats of the world, to effectuate their pronouncements without blame or feedback.

Thus, it is true that Allah *Glorified is He* has deprived some people of a completely healthy mind through which they can perceive reality as clearly as others. Some people may wonder why Allah *Glorified is He* would impose such afflictions on some people. Here, we need to view the issue of mental disease from all of its relevant angles.

When Allah *Glorified is He* deprived some people from the ability to interact soundly, he may have given them other blessings that many sane people are wishing and desiring. In the events of their insanity, these people are allowed a life of decreased responsibility, where Allah *Glorified is He* forbade sane people from objecting to their behaviour. No one in society is allowed to scold or berate them. With Allah's Commands, everyone should be gentle and caring towards people with such special needs. On top of that, they are not subjected to any reckoning in the Hereafter. Is there any respect which excels

this? Therefore, even if someone is being deprived of a particular blessing that seems standard among most people, they may have received other blessings that can only be recognized by our insight and consideration.

If you see someone who is blind, for example, you should never consider yourself better than him in Allah's sight. No one among us is favoured due to a lineage or family roots, and indeed, we are all equal. Therefore, an individual who was deprived of the blessing of sight could have been compensated, for instance, by having heightened abilities to use their other senses. This means that Allah's scales are always balanced.

Read this couplet of poetry composed by a poet who, himself, had been deprived of the blessing of sight. He said:

My blindness was decreed before the time I was born,
but from blindness flows an intelligent mind.
Thus, I arrived in this world, amazing others,
with a clear memory prepared for learning.
With the absence of the eye as a support for the mind,
I grasped the knowledge that eluded most people.⁽¹⁾

The poet narrated the qualities of people afflicted with blindness. This includes their intelligence, innate depth of perception and extraordinary inclination towards attaining knowledge. Indeed, the qualities that he highlighted are readily observable by anyone who has lived with a blind person. Moreover, this is what we generally observe concerning those who have disabilities.

(1) These two lines of poetry were composed by Bashir ibn Burd. He actually composed these verses after people commented about one of his earlier verses, in which he said, *"The dust which floated above our heads were shining, with the glimmer of our swords, as a night's sky shining with its falling stars."*

People said, "No one has ever offered a metaphor or simile more descriptive than this. How can you do so when you have never seen anything in this world?"

Bashir responded, "Indeed, the absence of sight strengthens the intellect and the heart. They are not occupied with the things that the eyes customarily gaze upon. This grants the mind a heightened sensitivity to touch as well as an inherent intellectual and artistic depth."

Then, he recited the two verses mentioned about the qualities of blindness. This is an excerpt from *Al-Aghani* which was written by Abu Al-Faraj Al-Asfahani (1/376).

Allah *Glorified is He* has tested them by depriving them of something in their physical constitution, but then, Allah also counteracted that by granting them a different blessing. He does this as a consolation for them and to help them deal with their losses. However, sometimes, this compensation is very subtle. It requires people with sound perception to recognize these blessings.

In the same fashion, we saw how many people, in life, who were tested by the absence of some blessings, persevered to lead lives of excellence in other areas. They affirmed their values in society and developed the necessary balance to lead productive and dignified lives within their communities. An example of this phenomenon can be observed in the German economist Schacht who had a deformity in his legs that relieved him of compulsory military duty. This actually strengthened his resolve to make a significant contribution to his country. He chose economics as his endeavour and excelled in drafting the plans which aided his nation in achieving economic stability. Schacht went on to become the leading economist in Germany.⁽¹⁾

We must realize that the process of creation of human beings does not yield the same predictable results that we may find in rigid mathematical methods. A machine may produce large numbers of units of the same appearance and function, giving us the same result every time, but the creative act of the Creator is not mechanistic. Biological diversity and disparity from solid patterns and norms is an essential character of Allah's creative act. This diversity entails an absolute wisdom, as it demonstrates the Omnipotent Will of the Creator. You will easily notice this phenomenon in siblings, born to the same parents, differing in their complexions, heights, and aptitudes.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'And among His wonders are the creation of the heavens and the Earth and the diversity of your tongues and colours' (*ar-Rum*: 22). Allah's Power to create beings from nothing is an ability that cannot be duplicated by humans. Furthermore, the Creator *Glorified is He* willed the existence of handicapped people and those who endure deficiencies

(1) Hjalmar Horace Greeley Schacht (22 January 1877 – 3 June 1970) was a German economist, banker, liberal politician, and co-founder in 1918 of the German Democratic Party. He served as the Currency Commissioner and President of the Reich bank under the Weimar Republic. He was a fierce critic of his country's post-World War I reparation obligations.

in their physical constitution. This is a pertinent reminder to mankind when they become forgetful of Allah's immense favour upon them. Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Nay, verily, man becomes grossly transgressing, whenever he believes himself to be self-sufficient' (*al-'Alaq*: 6-7).

In many instances, people are led astray as a result of the blessings they enjoy because they are heedless that Allah *Glorified is He* is the source of these blessings. Thus, when they encounter those who have been afflicted with difficulties, they may start to take notice and call to mind the favours of Allah *Glorified is He* upon them. You will find that many people who enjoy the blessing of sight take it for granted until they encounter a blind person having difficulties crossing a street. At that moment, they may recall the blessing of vision while uttering, 'Allah *Glorified is He* is worthy of all praise.' Thus, people who endure handicaps are not insignificant in Allah's sight. On the contrary, in addition to these handicaps being tests of honour for those who endure them, they also turn the attention of other people to the favours of Allah *Glorified is He* upon them.

However, it is disheartening to see a person who is being tried with an affliction failing to cope with the test of their Lord. Some of them may complain to other people about Allah's will, saying 'Look at what Allah has done to me!' In this way, they may be using their affliction as a means to earn a living which they do not deserve, by asking money from other people under false pretences. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told us, 'If you are tested with an affliction, conceal it (as much as you can).'⁽¹⁾ A person who exposes his afflictions to other people is complaining to the creation

(1) Cited by Al-'Ajiluni in his work *Kashf Al-khafa'* (211) with the wording 'If you are tested with disobedience (to Allah *Glorified is He*), conceal it.' Also, Hakim recorded in his *Mustadrak* (4/244), from a Hadith that was narrated by 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar may Allah be pleased with him, that Prophet Muhammad stood after the Aslami was stoned for adultery and said, 'Avoid the impure things that Allah *Glorified is He* has forbidden. Whoever succumbs (to temptation), let him conceal his actions within the cover that Allah *Glorified is He* has provided and repent to Allah *Glorified is He* for indeed, whoever divulges unto us the wrongs that he has committed can only expect that we will carry out the punishments the Book of Allah *Glorified is He* has prescribed for his action.' Al-Hakim said, 'This Hadith is authentic when graded in light of the conditions set by Al-Bukhari and Muslim. However, they did not narrate it.'

about the Creator! On the other hand, if such a person righteously conceals the hardships they are enduring, the Lord *Glorified is He* will provide their livelihood to their doors without difficulty or complaint.

Worse than that is the way some healthy people call for undue attention by feigning handicaps or illness. Their aim is to earn the sentiments of other people in order to garner their financial support. These are acts of robbery using the illusion of weakness and need.

Now, let us refocus our attention on the story of Prophet Musa and Pharaoh to summarize its thought-provoking lessons. The first point is that Pharaoh was primarily responsible for the upbringing and rearing of Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* since he was a newly born child. That was after Pharaoh had ordered the systematic extermination of the male children among the people of Prophet Musa. We are highlighting these elements of the story to point out that Allah *Glorified is He* can place a barrier between a man and his inherent desires. Indeed, the will of Allah *Glorified is He* is always successful.

Allah *Glorified is He* placed the parental love of Musa in the hearts of Pharaoh and his wife. Pharaoh's wife expressed this love by telling Pharaoh: 'A joy to the eye (could this child be) for me and for you! Slay him not, as he may well be of use to us, or we may adopt him as a son.' (*al-Qasas*: 9) The inherent hatred and hostility that Pharaoh had for Israelite children disappeared. Why did he love this child in particular? It must have passed his mind that this child was cast into the open water by his family in order to avoid his murder! Why did this conclusion evade his thinking? The reason can be found in Allah's saying: 'Allah intervenes between man and (the desires of) his heart' (*al-Anfal*: 24). Indeed, Pharaoh did not respond in the way that was typical of him because Allah *Glorified is He* had disarmed the insight of his heart. Thus, the ignorance and stupidity of this corrupt ruler was made apparent for all the people to see.

Additionally, the story also points to the fact that the attention and nurturing of Allah the Greatest Lord, is always above the most direct and intimate parental attention. A poet once said, as an expression of this point:

'If you do not find care from your children when you are elderly, with the one you expected to support you letting you down and the one you hoped for

was not around, bear in mind that the boy who was raised by Angel Gabriel became a disbeliever, and Moses who was raised by Pharaoh became a messenger!' Then Allah Glorified is He said:

فَأَرَادَ أَنْ يَسْتَفِزَّهُمْ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ فَأَغْرَقْنَاهُ وَمَنْ مَعَهُ جَمِيعًا ﴿١٠٣﴾

**So he wanted to wipe them off the [face of the] earth,
but We drowned him and those with him [103]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 103)**

Previously, we discussed the meaning of the term *istaffaza* during our observation of Allah's statement: 'And incite (O Satan) (*istafziz*) whoever you can among them with your voice,' (*al-Isra'*: 64). Within our current verse, the term *istifzaz* takes on the meaning of a disturbance created by loud screaming. A person who is startled by a loud voice will be stirred to rapid action. These are the types of sounds that were formerly used by cavalymen, and are still used by martial artists, to frighten or disrupt the composure of their opponents' concentration. Consequently, the opponent may be overcome or driven away in moments of combat or confrontation. The everyday usage of the Arabic term *istifzaz* appears when a parent orders a lazy child: *Fiz!* This means, 'Get up to do your work!'

Pharaoh wanted to deceive the people of Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* in a way that drives them out of the land. He thought that once Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* and his followers are gone, he would have sole control of the whole territory. This is an indication of Pharaoh's idiocy, heedlessness, and foolishness! Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* was sent by Allah Glorified is He to free the children of Israel in the first place! This was clearly pointed out in Allah's words: 'And go, both of you (Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron)), unto Pharaoh and say, "Behold, we bear a message from the Lord of all the worlds: Let the children of Israel leave with us!"' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 16-17) Pharaoh, in his idiocy, aided Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* in the completion of his mission. Indeed, the will of Allah Glorified is He was operating above and beyond the will of Pharaoh. Pharaoh wanted to expel the children of Israel so that he can wield sole control over the land, and the will of Allah

Glorified is He dictated that Pharaoh himself would be driven from his worldly life! In the end, he was seized by Allah's might and drowned before he could carry out his plots against the children of Israel.

In one of the rural farm areas, a farmer quarrelled with his neighbour and threatened to burn his neighbour's crops the following year. That man died before the following crop season! This led the people to say, 'He died before the crops even ripened!' In the same manner, Allah *Glorified is He* drowned Pharaoh and his entire entourage before they had the chance to apply their plots, Allah said:

وَقُلْنَا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ لِبَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ اسْكُنُوا الْأَرْضَ فَإِذَا
جَاءَ وَعْدُ الْآخِرَةِ جِئْنَا بِكُمْ لَفِيفًا ﴿١٠٤﴾

**After his death, We told the Children of Israel, 'Live in the
land, and when the promise of the Hereafter is fulfilled, We
shall bring you to the assembly of all people' [104]
(The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 104)**

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* is referring to the time that followed the death of Prophet Musa. The verse said: 'Dwell securely on earth,' and many scholars ⁽¹⁾ claimed that this expression referred to the Holy Land, specifically Jerusalem. We need to analyze this opinion closely. This is the same land that Allah *Glorified is He* had mentioned in the following verse, in which Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* ordered his people: 'O my people! Enter the Holy Land⁽²⁾ which Allah has promised you' (*al-Ma'ida*: 21). However, their response

(1) This includes the statements of Al-Qurtubi, who, in his *Tafsir* (5/4067), said: "The places they were made to dwell were the Eastern Mediterranean and Egypt."

(2) In his *Tafsir* (2/37), Ibn Kathir wrote, "Ibn 'Abbas said, 'It (the Holy Land) refers to At-Tur and its direct vicinity.'" The same was said by Mujahid and others. A separate narration from Ibn 'Abbas contains the following, "It is Jericho." This position has also garnered some support among *Quranic exegetes*. However, this may not be right because Jericho is certainly not the city they were intended to enter victoriously, nor was it one of the townships they would have passed through on their way to Jerusalem. It would only be plausible if 'Jericho' is the name of another piece of land that is directly surrounding Jerusalem. This is the position that is narrated on behalf of Suddi, as narrated by ibn Jarir. It might not be the same city known as Jericho that is a well-known township bordering tur to the east of Jerusalem.

to Prophet Musa's order was as follows: 'O Musa! Ferocious people⁽¹⁾ dwell in that land, and we surely are not entering it unless they depart from it,' (*al-Ma'ida*: 22). They also said: 'O Musa! Never shall we enter that (land) so long as those others are in it. Go forth, then, you and your Lord, and fight, both of you! We, shall remain here, sitting!' (*al-Ma'ida*: 24)

The word earth (as it appears in the verse under examination) does not have any additional adjectives. The verse simply stated: 'Dwell securely on earth.' As we can see clearly, the meaning of the word is vaguely assigned. This is different from the specific saying, 'Dwell in the sacred land of Mecca or the land of Medina.' If you want to give someone permission to settle down and take up residence in a place, like Alexandria, for example, you would order them, 'Take a residence in Alexandria.'

How can I make sense of this command when I am technically already residing in the 'land'? Obviously, you would need to be a bit more specific. Commenting upon this portion of the verse, we offer: The statement of Allah *the Exalted* '...Dwell now securely on earth...' was issued in this way; without specifying a particular place in order to accommodate the verses of the Quran that make it clear that they (the Children of Israel) would be dispersed widely throughout the earth. This of course implies that during the time they would not have a single homeland in which they—as a collective body—could settle. Indeed, this is affirmed by the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'And We dispersed them as [separate] communities all over the earth...' (*al-A'raf*: 168). In actual fact, the reality that we observe taking shape after the revelation of this verse supports its assertion: We see that they (the Jewish Diaspora) were

(1) *Many Quranic exegetes have mentioned that the attempt to identify these ferocious people mentioned in the verse has yielded conflicting narrations. The reason is that the Children of Israel have fabricated a number of Hadiths concerning the bodily prowess of the people who were referred to as ferocious. Some of them have included a man named 'Awaj ibn 'Unuq bint Adam. He has been described (in these false Israelite Hadiths) as being three-thousand, three-hundred and thirty-three (3,333) cubits tall! This is a narration that we should be embarrassed to even mention. Additionally, it clearly contradicts what has been narrated in the two Sahih books: "Prophet Muhammad is narrated to have said, 'Indeed, Allah Glorified is He created Adam. His height was 60 cubits. From the time of Adam's creation down to the present day, the average height of people has been decreasing.' This is an excerpt from the Tafsir of Ibn Kathir (2/38).*

spread throughout the nations of the world. Peculiarly, when they would take up residence in these various places throughout the world, they would always create separate little enclaves in which they would form their communities. That is to say, they never mixed with the peoples of the host countries in which they were residing. You would find every group living as though it was an independent nation (inside a nation)—they never mixed with others.

As for the statement of Allah *the Exalted*: ‘...when the promise of the Last Day shall come to pass, We will bring you forth as [parts of] a motley crowd!’ (*al-Isra*’: 104) In terms of what is intended by (the promise of the Last Day), it represents the second disgrace of the children of Israel. To be sure, Allah had already addressed the first disgrace of the children of Israel—it occurred in the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘And we made [this] known to the children of Israel through revelation, “Twice, indeed, will you spread corruption on earth and will indeed become grossly overbearing!” Hence, when the prediction of the first of those two [periods of iniquity] came true, We sent against you some of Our bondmen of terrible prowess in war, and they wrought havoc throughout the land: and so the prediction was fulfilled.’ (*al-Isra*’: 4-5)

Indeed, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* had kept them under surveillance from outside their dwellings in Medina. But it was not simply the Medinas’ Jews; this also included the Bani-Qurayzha as well as the Bani-Qaynuqa and the Bani-Nadir tribes. In the end, the Messenger wound up expelling them from Medina and banishing them to scattered areas throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. After this occurrence, the relationship between Muslims and Jews remained disconnected for quite some time.

Afterward, addressing this second disgrace of the children of Israel, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...And so, when the prediction of the second [period of your iniquity] came true, [We raised new enemies against you, and allowed them] to disgrace you utterly, and to enter the temple as [their forerunners] had entered it once before, and to destroy with utter destruction all that they had conquered’ (*al-Isra*’: 7).

In speaking of this second disgrace, we are living in the time of its occurrence. By that, we mean that the Jews will begin taking up residence in

one nation so that the promise of Allah—to requite them for their actions—can be effectuated. Would the Muslims be able to combat the Jews if they were spread throughout the earth? No doubt, it was the True Lord *Glorified is He* who inspired them with the idea of establishing a ‘national Jewish homeland’, as they call it. This makes it very easy to combat them all at once; once Allah requites them, they will not be able to slip away. Assuredly, Allah will seize them within His mighty and powerful grip.

This is what is being referred to within the portion of the verse which reads: ‘...We will bring you forth as [parts of] a motley crowd!’ (*al-Isra'*: 104) That is to say: A mixed crowd brought together from countries all over the world. Indeed, this is a proper description of what is now taking place in Palestine.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَبِالْحَقِّ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ وَبِالْحَقِّ نَزَلَ وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا مُبَشِّرًا وَنَذِيرًا ﴿١٠٥﴾

**We sent down the Quran with the truth, and with the truth
it has come down – [Prophet], We sent you only to give good
news and warning [105] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 105)**

The statement of Allah: ‘And as a guide towards the truth have We bestowed this [revelation] from on high...’ (*al-Isra'*: 105). The word *al-haqq* (or the truth) comes from this idea of effectuating or carrying something out, as in the Arabic expression *haqqa ash-shay'*. In a sense, this can be taken to mean establishing something. The truth then, is something which is established and does not undergo change. On the other hand, falsehood is constantly changing; it will always take on the colour of the context in which it is situated. This is the nature of falsity; it is bound to perish. Nevertheless, the variation that exists within falsehood implies that it will take on many different forms; while the truth, conversely, only has one form.

For this reason, when Allah *Glorified is He* gives us parables for truth and falsehood He says: ‘[Whenever] He sends down water from the sky, and [once-dry] river-beds are running high according to their measure, the stream carries scum on its surface; and, likewise, from that [metal] which they smelt in the fire in order to make ornaments or utensils, [there rises] scum. In this way does Allah

set forth the parable of truth and falsehood: for, as far as the scum is concerned, it passes away as [does all] dross; but that which is of benefit to man abides on earth. In this way does Allah set forth the parables' (*ar-Ra'd*: 17).

Therefore, if you witness a historical period in which the people of truth have been afflicted with weakness and feebleness, while the people of falsehood have gained the upper hand, do not be deceived. The people of falsehood have merely risen to the surface like foam rising to the water's surface. It is there, but its being there does not contain benefit for anyone. Moreover, as soon as a strong wind from any direction comes upon the river, the water—which is pure and beneficial for people—will become distinct, whereas the foam will dissipate without having benefitted anyone. In the end, the pure water—which offers innumerable benefits to human beings in terms of consumption, farming, etc.—will remain in the earth.

This parable demonstrates the way falsehood is constantly changing and being altered. However, in spite all its changes it is still unable to truly benefit anyone. Again, the truth is established and impervious to frivolous change. This is primarily due to its being a manifestation of the Allah, the Ultimate Truth *Glorified is He*. He is the True Lord *Glorified is He* and it goes without saying that He is well above any change.

As for the portion of the verse which reads '...We bestowed this [revelation] from on high...' (*al-Isra'*: 105), we notice that the attached personal pronoun (translated here as (*this*)) is not preceded by anything that explains what it refers to. While it is true that an attached personal pronoun often represents something that is well known to all of those being addressed, it should still be mentioned alongside the object or person to which it refers, out of grammatical etiquette. Nevertheless, here the attached personal pronoun has not been preceded by anything. There are other instances within the Book of Allah where the attached personal pronoun has been preceded by that to which it refers, such as the statement of Allah *the Exalted*: 'Say: If all mankind and all invisible beings would come together with a view to producing the like of this Quran, they could not produce its like...' (*al-Isra'*: 88). Within this verse, the attached personal pronoun that appears in the Arabic *bi mithlihi* translated here as 'its like' of course refers to the Quran whose explicit mention precedes it within the verse.

We would also like to add that if an attached personal pronoun appears without being preceded by the thing to which it refers, it must be something highly specific, i.e., something in which no two people can find room to differ concerning. We see an example of this in the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘Say: “He is Allah the One”’ (*al-Ikhlās*: 1). Here we see the use of a personal pronoun (though in this case it is a detached personal pronoun) which has not been preceded by the thing to which it refers because it could only refer to Allah *the Exalted*. There is no disagreement concerning this matter.

The same can be said of the verse we are currently exploring: ‘...We bestowed this [revelation] from on high...’ (*al-Isra'*: 105). There can be absolutely no doubt: This refers to the Quran. Indeed, the Quran is something established, precise, and uncontested. The verb ‘bestowed’ has been selected to convey transitiveness. As though the speech of the True Lord *Glorified is He* the Quran had been safeguarded in the ‘Preserved Tablet’ (*al-Lawh al-Mahfūz*) until the time for the Quran to effectuate its purpose arrived.

Once that time had arrived, Allah sent down the entirety of the Quran from the ‘Preserved Tablet’ to the lowest heaven. This is what we understand from the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘Behold, from on high have We bestowed this [Book] on the Night of Destiny.’ (*al-Qadr*: 1) Comparing this (the point just discussed concerning chapter of *al-Qadr*) to the verse we have been exploring; the bestowal ‘We bestowed this’ being discussed in this verse is the same as that of the chapter of *al-Qadr*. Afterward, over a period of twenty-three years, Allah incrementally revealed the Quran as the circumstances surrounding the Prophet’s mission dictated. That is to say, every time something would happen, a Quranic instalment would be revealed to specifically treat the matter at hand.

Turning to yet another aspect of the verse: ‘...We bestowed this...’ (*al-Isra'*: 105): We find the use of the word ‘We’. This refers to the True Lord *Glorified is He*: it is He who safeguarded the Quran in the ‘Preserved Tablet’, and it is He who bestowed it: He bestowed upon the trustworthy angel that he had selected—for the task of conveying revelation. ‘Trustworthy divine inspiration has alighted with it from on high’ (*ash-Shu‘ara*: 193): Although not specifically named, this is a reference to Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*. Jibril is the Angel who has been especially honoured by Allah and (in one place) even

equated with the Spirit (The Souls of man created by Allah). The Quran has also been equated with the Spirit, Allah says: 'And thus, too, [O Muhammad] have We revealed unto you a life-giving Message...' (*ash-Shura*: 52)

Furthermore, He has mentioned concerning the Quran: 'behold, this [Book] is indeed the [inspired] word of a noble Apostle' (*at-Takwir*: 19). The noble (angel) did not conceal or omit any of what was revealed to him: 'with strength endowed, secure with Him Who in almightiness is enthroned [20] [the word] of one to be heeded, and worthy of trust! [21]' (*at-Takwir*: 20-21); these verses contain descriptions of Jibril *peace be upon him*: The angel who descended with the revelation from the True Lord *Glorified is He*. After this however, to whom did he convey the heavenly messages? Of course, he conveyed them to none other than 'The Chosen One', the one known for his trustworthiness among human beings: 'For this fellow-man of yours is not a madman: he truly beheld [the angel – beheld] him on the clear horizon; and he is not one to begrudge others the knowledge [of whatever has been revealed to him] out of that which is beyond the reach of human perception. Nor is this [message] the word of any satanic force accursed.' (*at-Takwir*: 22-25) Accordingly, we can conclude that the Quran that we have in our hands is the exact same Quran that descended from the 'Preserved Tablet.' This Quran represents the established truth concerning which there is no doubt; it is true, and not a single character within its text has been changed. From now until the coming of the Final Hour, none will be able to locate discrepancies or other inconsistencies that would suggest that the Quran is false.

Following this, Allah *the Exalted* says: '...with this [very] truth it has come down...' (*al-Isra*': 105). First we find the statement: 'And as a guide towards the truth have We bestowed this [revelation] from on high...' (*al-Isra*': 105). This implies that all of the means through which this revelation materialised are sound and firm: All of them are rooted in truth and cannot be approached by doubt or suspicion. As for the statement '...with this [very] truth it has come down...' (*al-Isra*': 105) itself, it refers to the content of the Quran. The content of the Quran is true just as its sources and means of conveyance are. In fact, the Quran came down as a miracle; it is a book of spiritual reflection, but it also gives practical guidelines concerning how one should live. In

addressing just how miraculous it is we need look no further than the fact that it challenged those renowned for their eloquence, linguistic purity and stylistic depth—and at every level of the challenge proved their inability to match the Quran. The practical instructions for our lives in the Quran are rooted in truth.

The first thing we encounter within the guidance of the Quran is a focused conversation about the fundamental beliefs that serve as the foundations for every religious and philosophical tradition. This means that before the Quran instructs you: ‘Allah said...’ or ‘Allah has commanded...’ it views teaching about Who Allah is and who the Messenger conveying Allah’s message is as first priorities. Belief is the fountainhead from which behaviour and disposition flows.

Accordingly, the Quran lays out the basics of divinity and clarifies that Allah *the Exalted* is One, and that He possesses characteristics and attributes of total perfection. Not stopping there, the Quran also lays down the basics concerning the angels, prophecy, miracles, the place of return and the Last Day. These matters would be considered matters of belief. Indeed, the priority shown these matters (in the Quran) is reflective of how Islam views itself and its first responsibility: To provide a fortress inside which (correct) belief can be taught. While in the Meccan phase, the Prophetic Mission was nearly entirely concentrated on this aspect of the faith as opposed to other legitimate aspects of the faith. This was done so that the Muslims could give this issue—which is the foundation of the faith—its due consideration. Properly attaining this matter is tantamount to properly attaining submission to Allah and resignation to His will.

The human being neither resigns to the will nor consigns his affair besides to one he trusts. In that case, gaining first-hand knowledge concerning Allah is a must. After knowledge, faith in Him *the Exalted* and affirming the truth of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* are simply natural outcomes.

The Quran also contains laws and rulings which are established and do not change; that is, they cannot be abrogated by any other scripture due to finality of the Quran. This is expressed in the Quran with the following wording: ‘...Today have I perfected your religious law for you, and have bestowed upon you the full measure of my blessings, and willed that Islam be your religion...’ (*al-Ma’ida*: 3).

In summary, we may conclude that the Quran has been revealed with the truth as it relates to: Divinity, angels, prophecy, miracles, laws, and rulings. These things are true and cannot be doubted in the least. Again, the established truth descended from Allah through the medium He has chosen from among the angel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* unto whom He has chosen from among men and women Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. All of this points to the fact that the truth—which is established and does not change—was sent with protection and fortification.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* spoke truthfully when He said: ‘Behold, it is We Ourselves who have bestowed from on high, step by step, this reminder: and, behold, it is We who shall truly guard it [from all corruption].’ (*al-Hijr*: 9) Here, we would like to cite some contemporary evidence that also points to the fact that the Quran contains unwavering truth; truth that will only become more manifest with the passage of time. In Germany, one of the lawmakers formulated a new law that made provision for the discretionary use of law (perhaps when systematic application would result in an unfavourable outcome). In doing this, they were under the impression that they had developed something unprecedented; they really believed that they had uncovered some new legal implement that would permit them to punish those who try to usurp others' rights.

Sometime down the line, a lawyer from Bani Sweif travelled there to study. While there, he stumbled upon some readings about this new law that they were claiming to have pioneered. Later on, he informed them, ‘this law that you are enthusiastically claiming for yourselves is an Islamic Law, in fact, it can be found in the Hadith of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.’ Upon receiving the news, they eagerly headed for some of the Prophetic biographies and located the story of a man who had complained to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* that someone owned a palm tree that was either growing on his property or leaning onto his property. The owner of the tree would make use of it in different ways: tacking things to it, hanging things on it, etc., thus when he wanted to make use of the tree, he would burst into the home of his neighbour. So, what was the judgment of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in this case? One of the men has the right to make use of his tree, but he is being prevented from it by something beyond

his control and as a result he is engaging in distasteful conduct (by breaking into the home of his neighbour). The supposed outcome would have the owner of the tree only entering the home of his neighbour as necessity dictated, for example, to prune the tree, graft it, or gather its fruit. {The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* brought the man forth and said to him: 'You can either grant him the palm tree as a gift, sell it to him, or you can cut it down.'}

Is this not from the truth (in terms of civil law) that Islam brought and introduced? Is this not a proof of the amazing breadth of the divine law? Allah's law contains guidance for how all matters should be handled, big and small.

To this, you can add what some Illuminist scholars have said concerning the meaning of: '...with this [very] truth it has come down...' (*al-Isra'*: 105), they have opined that the (very) truth that it has come down with is the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. Just as one might say I visited Cairo and alighted (*nazala*) with so and so. That is to say: I alighted (*nazala*) with him or in his living space.

Next, the True Lord *the Exalted* says: '...For we have sent you but as a herald of glad tidings and a warner' (*al-Isra'*: 105) For a tidings to be considered glad it must contain good news. Conversely, a warning normally contains bad news. However, in both the scenarios of issuing a glad tidings or a warning, there is a condition that must be fulfilled: Namely, that the one being informed of the good news or being warned be given an opportunity to confer with himself and alter his conduct (if the situation calls for that) appropriately. If this condition is not fulfilled, the idea of issuing a warning or a glad tidings is completely futile and void of benefit. Therefore, you must convey the glad tidings of Paradise or the warning of the doom of Hell, while there is sufficient time (for the one being informed) to assume the actions that will lead him to paradise or to refrain from the behaviour that is leading him up the road to perdition.

For example, say you gave your child good news of success and a bright future if he works hard and warned him of failure if he is negligent. It goes without saying that you could not tell him this the night before the final exams; on the contrary, you would have to tell him while he still had sufficient time to choose what he wanted.

Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* is informing His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* of the nature of his duty as Messenger in its truest sense. He is the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* which means that it is his duty to simply convey both the glad tidings and the warning; by no means is he to assume a level of responsibility (for their guidance or misguidance) above his calling. Making his people believers has not been made incumbent upon him. It is Just as Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned: 'But would you, perhaps, torment yourself to death with grief over them if they are not willing to believe in this message?' (*al-Kahf*: 6)

That is: Perhaps you might destroy yourself or be driven to intense sadness over their failure to believe. In another verse He said: 'Would you, perhaps, torment yourself to death [with grief] because they [who live around you] refuse to believe [in it]?' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 3). It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* has lessened the burden of His Messenger and is calling him to refrain from wearing himself out in his attempt to call them to the faith: Conveying the message is his only responsibility. Guiding unto the faith is the prerogative of none other than Allah *the Exalted*.

Nevertheless, the anxiety that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* experienced over the guidance of his people was a consequence of the comprehensiveness with which he embraced and fully embodied the state that he himself had summed up in the statement, 'By Allah, none of you truly believes until he desires for his brother what he desires for himself.'⁽¹⁾

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* had attained a perfect state of faith and he would have loved for his people to experience it as he had. This also went for his enemies; even those who had boldly and impudently attempted to impede the progress of his mission right down until their final moments of struggle. He was hoping that they too would be given faith and salvation. In fact, even after he had been given the upper hand and could requite them for bad actions he did not do so; instead He said to them: 'No;

(1) *The authenticity this Prophetic Hadith has been agreed upon. It was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (13) and by Muslim in his Sahih (45) in Kitab Al-Iman. The narrator of the Hadith is Anas ibn-Malik and the wording is as follows: {I swear by He in whose hands is my soul, no servant of Allah has attained perfect belief until he loves for his neighbor (or perhaps he said brother) that which he loves for himself.}*

(I don not desire their punishment) rather, it is my ardent hope that Allah will bring from their seed a people who will worship Him alone and will ascribe divinity to nothing else.⁽¹⁾

Undoubtedly, Allah and His Messenger have spoken the truth, to be sure, the ascendants of those people went on to carry the standard of the faith. In actual fact, many of them wound up being some of the fiercest warriors in service of the faith. We are speaking of men the likes of 'Ikrima ibn-Abu Jahl, 'Amr ibn Al-'As, and Khalid ibn Al-Walid *may Allah be pleased with them* when they were disbelievers there were a great many Muslims who would have jumped at the chance to kill them in the early battles of Islam. They had no clue that Allah had not allowed them to take the lives of these men for a wise purpose: They would after a time be with you as warriors and battle commanders for the faith!

After this, the True Lord *Glorified is He* said:

وَقُرْءَانًا فَرَقْنَاهُ لِتَقْرَأَهُ عَلَى النَّاسِ عَلَى مُكْثٍ وَنَزَّلْنَاهُ نَزِيلًا ۝١٠٦

**It is a recitation that We have revealed in parts, so that you
can recite it to people at intervals; We have sent it down
little by little [106] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 106)**

The meaning of *faraqnah* (gradually unfolded) is to spread out or to send down gradually, i.e., in separate instalments, each in accordance with what the circumstances demanded. As for the meaning of *ala makath* (by stages), it carries a connotation of gradualness, deliberation and steadiness.

(1) This was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his *Sahih* (3231, 7389). It is based upon a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of 'A'isha *may Allah be pleased with her* in which she said: *Jibril (Gabriel) peace be upon him said to the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him 'Indeed, Allah has heard what your people have been saying about you and how they have denounced you. Now, Allah is sending unto you the angel who has been placed in charge of the mountains in order that you might command him as you wish—in terms of what you want to say done about your people. Then the angel of the mountains called me and greeted me. After this, he said: 'O Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him if you choose, I can smash them in between the two crags.' The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him responded by saying: 'No; (I do not desire their punishment) rather, it is my ardent hope that Allah will bring from their seed a people who will worship Him alone and will ascribe divinity to nothing else.'*

In fact, this verse was revealed in response to the disbelievers who claimed that the Quran should have been revealed all at once. Allah *Glorified is He* faithfully transmits their (weak) position when He says: ‘Now they who are bent on denying the truth are wont to ask, “Why has the Quran not been bestowed on him from on high in one single revelation?”’ (*al-Furqan*: 32)

The first thing that jumps out to us about the style in which they posed their question is that it exposes them. The contradiction in which they are, by now, wallowing is unmistakable. In previous verses did not we observe them claiming the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* had fabricated the Quran? Now they are apparently acknowledging that it did in fact descend upon him from on high. This would imply that he has nothing to do with how it descends, correct? Earlier, we clarified that they were not, in fact, attacking the Quran, but it was the person of the Messenger to whom the Quran was revealed.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* takes up the task of rebutting what they had proposed. He demonstrates how their suggestion is baseless: It is out of step with the very nature of the Quran. It would not befit the Quran to descend all at once as they suggested. Within the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses them in the following ways: ‘...[It has been revealed] in this manner so that We might strengthen your heart thereby...’ (*al-Furqan*: 32).

In this manner, Allah has revealed (the Quran) in this way—the way that you have attempted to criticize—by design. The Quran descends in segments that address particular circumstances, for a reason: ‘...so that We might strengthen your heart thereby...’ (*al-Furqan*: 32). For indeed the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* would be subjected to a great deal of insolence from the disbelievers, not to mention the mockery, ridicule, oppression, castigation and subjugation that he would be forced to withstand. It goes without saying that he needed to be consoled and reinforced (by Allah).

Accordingly, revelation descending day after day and treating the circumstances he had to confront was a major source of relief for him: It reduced his burden and the other ill effects of what he had to suffer of the hardships and difficulties inherent within inviting to Islam. The constant descending of revelation represented an on-going direct connection between him and the One by whom he was sent. On the other hand, if the Quran would have been

revealed all at once, the Prophet's reinforcement from Allah (which occurred through the act of revelation) would have also only occurred once, and the direct line of communication between the Prophet and his Lord would have been lost. This is the aspect of the verse which relates to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* '...for We have so arranged its component parts that they form one consistent whole' (*al-Furqan*: 32). That is: We have sent it (the Quran) down in stages, piece by piece. As for the term *ratl*, it refers to the individual parts of that make up a consistent whole. For example, we would say the *ratl* (parts) of an automobile. This is the way the Quran was revealed: one section of verses after another. This method of revelation made it very easy for the Companions of the Prophet to commit the Quran to memory, understand its import and act according to its proscriptions. They *may Allah be pleased with them* would commit a group of verses to memory and act according to them; like this, the matter of memorizing the Quran and acting according to the lessons it imparts was simplified for them. This was a special distinction granted to the Companions, those whose responsibility it was to preserve the Quran. Ironically, even up until the present day, we still separate the Quran into sections and parts to facilitate memorization: We divide the verses over a group of tablets and memorize the contents of each tablet, one after another.

'and [that] they [who deny the truth] might never taunt you with any deceptive half-truth without Our conveying to you the [full] truth and [providing you] with the best explanation.' (*al-Furqan*: 33) This refers to the opponents of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* those who stubbornly resisted the Way of Allah, that is who would confront him and attempt to discredit him by pulling the wool over his eyes in relation to some matters. It was inevitable that a response which exposed the falsity of their (would be) proofs would need to be furnished at an appropriate time. If the Quran was revealed all at once this process would have been frustrated.

As for the portion of the verse which reads: 'and [that] they [who deny the truth] might never taunt you with any deceptive half-truth...' (*al-Furqan*: 33). That is to say: never will they taunt you with something strange by which they intend to discredit you, without Our conveying to you the [full] truth. This is clarifying that Allah's response to them will consist of the established and indisputable truth.

If we could turn our attention for a moment to some of the examples of how the Quran responded to them within a number of affairs, we would locate the following, each characterized by preciseness and dynamism.

So, when they attempted to cast aspersion on to the character of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying: ‘...If you were to follow [Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* you would follow] only a man bewitched!’ (*al-Isra’*: 47). The response of the Quran, the Word of Allah *the Exalted* came as follows: ‘Nuun. (Allah swears by the Arabic letter Nuun) Consider the pen, and all that they write [therewith]! You are not, by your Lord’s grace, a madman! and, verily, yours shall be a reward never-ending for, behold, you keep indeed to a sublime way of life’ (*al-Qalam*: 1-4). To be sure, someone bewitched would never be described as ‘keeping a sublime way of life.’

When they said: ‘...“what sort of apostle is this [man] who eats food [like all other mortals] and goes about in the market-places...?”’ (*al-Furqan*: 7) The Quran rebuffed them by pointing out: ‘...We never sent as Our Message-bearers any but [mortal men,] who indeed ate food [like other human beings] and went about in the market-places...’ (*al-Furqan*: 20). This means that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is not doing something without precedent as far as this issue goes. Indeed, he is like others among the Messengers; messengers for whom these characteristics (eating food and going about in the market places) are something generally known of them. If truth be told, it is these humanizing characteristics that make the example of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* such a complete model; precisely because he is a human being just like the other human beings Allah sent before him. If Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had represented some special case that did not apply to others, it might have been possible for them to raise a reasonable objection (against his legitimately being considered the Prophet) and advance an argument on its basis.

In light of this, the statement the Prophet used to make must be considered a display of courtesy toward his Lord first and then toward his companions. He would say: ‘Indeed, I am nothing beside a person who is sometimes admonished (That is: by way of revelation). So, if I were to say, “I exist in a class that leaves no room for comparison between you and I, I would be

called to account for it.” Instead, I prefer to say, “I am nothing besides a human being like you.””

Can you see the extent to which He embodied true humility? When they attempted to launch an accusation against The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* they said: ‘Does he [knowingly] attribute his own lying inventions to Allah—or is he a madman...?’ (*Saba’*: 8) The response of the Quran was contained in Allah’s word: ‘and so they assert, “[Muhammad, himself] has invented this [Quran]!’ Say [unto them]: “Produce, then, ten chapters of similar merit, invented [by yourselves], and [to this end] call to your aid whomever you can, other than Allah, if what you say is true!” (*Hud*: 13)

Afterward, the requirements of the challenge that Allah had issued them were relaxed and the challenge became easier: ‘And if you doubt any part of what We have bestowed from on high, step by step, upon our servant [Muhammad], then produce a chapter of similar merit...’ (*al-Baqara*: 23).

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* begins to engage them around this issue using the same lenient tone and elevated conduct throughout the exchange, He says: ‘Do some, perchance, assert, “[Muhammad] has invented this [story]?” Say [O Prophet]: “If I have invented it, upon me be this sin; but far be it from me to commit the sin of which you are guilty”’ (*Hud*: 35).

In a separate verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Say: “Neither shall you be called to account for whatever we may have become guilty of, nor shall we be called to account for whatever you are doing.”’ (*Saba’*: 25) Observe the manners being employed here: When the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* speaks of his own actions he says ‘whatever we may become guilty of’ but when he speaks of his enemies he does not attribute any wrong-doing to them; on the contrary, he says for ‘what you are doing’.

These examples of the truth that the Quran provided were intended to clear the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* of the attempts his people had made to discredit him. Imagine the Quran had been revealed all at once, would it have been possible to respond to these accusations, and to engage the Messenger’s people around the issues that they, themselves, had selected to harm the reputation of Allah’s Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*?

All of the previous examples were strictly related to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* consoling him as he worked to propagate the message of Islam. Nonetheless, there are also examples which relate to the issues of rulings (within the divine law) and legislation. Lest we forget that the Quran not only descended with guidance concerning belief, but that it also contains legal and legislative guidance. In addition to that, the Quran came down to stand as the lasting and permanent testament of Allah: it will remain unchanged until the Day of Judgment, that is to say, not a single character of its text will be abrogated in the way that previous scriptures were abrogated by the scriptures that were revealed after them.

If you analyse this issue of belief, you will find the statements about it definitive: they do not leave any room for ambiguity. The quintessential expression of this is contained in one statement: Allah is One and absolutely indivisible; He has no partners in His divinity. He possesses attributes of total perfection. This concise method of discussing creed is used again and again; it makes no difference what the topic is: the angels, resurrection after death, or judgment and accountability before Allah.

However, when the discussion shifts toward the day-to-day activities that men and women have become accustomed to, the method changes. Treating these matters requires gradualness and gentleness. Conciseness and brevity are not appropriate in dealing with them. One only needs to look at the method of the Divine Legislator *Glorified is He* when He willed to prohibit the consumption of wine; one immediately notices how He did it gradually—in a number of successive stages—until He finally extricated this deeply entrenched habit which had completely taken hold of that community. If the Quran had been revealed all at once would it have been possible to treat the matter this way?

Look at how it (the Quran) acknowledged—in the interest of gentleness—the fact that within wine there was something worth noting. Indeed, Allah *the Exalted* said: ‘And [We grant you nourishment] from the fruit of date-palms and vines: from it you derive intoxicants as well as wholesome sustenance...’ (*an-Nahl*: 67). As soon as some of the Companions heard this verse one of them said, ‘By Allah, it is as if Allah is covertly censuring wine.’ To be sure, he had understood it with the inherent depth he possessed in his

comprehension of the Arabic language; he recognized that Allah had described the word sustenance by referring to it as wholesome. On the other hand, He had opted to refrain from describing intoxicants at all: this implies that He did not refer to them as wholesome. Behind this mention we can detect something about intoxicants: They destroy the wholesome blessings of Allah and ruin them for those who have been granted them.

Next, the issue is handled in the manner of moral admonition and guidance, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'They will ask you about intoxicants and games of chance. Say: "In both there is great evil as well as some benefit for man; but the evil which they cause is greater than the benefit they bring..."' (*al-Baqara*: 219). In this manner, it revealed the truth of the matter after it had questioned them about it and gave them the freedom to choose. This verse should be understood as moral admonition and advice; not binding law and legislation. However, this paved the way for the unequivocal proscription of intoxicants shortly after that.

During the same time period, some of them would pray under the influence of intoxicants and hardly understand what they were saying. On one such occasion they heard an intoxicated person attempting to pray recite from the chapter of *al-Kafirun*: 'Say: "O you who deny the truth! I worship that which you worship."' The person standing next to him attempted to point out his mistake by signalling to him but realized that he was drunk. Shortly after, his story reached the Messenger of Allah, at which point the statement of Allah *the Exalted*⁽¹⁾ was revealed: 'O you who have attained unto faith! Do not

(1) On the authority of 'Ali ibn-Abutalb, may Allah honour him, who said, 'Abd Ar-Rahman ibn-'Awf prepared some food and called us to dine with him. While there, he served us some wine, and we began to feel its effects. Shortly after, the time for the prayer came upon us, and one from among our party stepped forward to lead us in prayer, he recited: Say: "O you who deny the truth! I worship that which you worship. And we worship that which you worship." Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* revealed: 'O you who have attained unto faith! Do not attempt to pray while you are in a state of drunkenness, [but wait] until you know what you are saying...' [*an-Nisa'*: 43] this story was cited by Ibn-Kathir in his (*Tafsir*) (1/500); concerning it he said, 'this was the way it was related by Ibn-Abu Hatim. While At-Tirmidhi related it on the authority of 'Abd ibn Hamid who related it from 'Abd Ar-Rahman Ad-Dashtaki; grading its authenticity, he said: (*hasan sahih*).

attempt to pray while you are in a state of drunkenness, [but wait] until you know what you are saying... (*an-Nisa*: 43).

With that, the period in which one could not consume wine became longer. Throughout the day obligatory prayer must be performed five times. As such, one would have to abstain from drinking before the prayer and leave enough time for the effects of the alcohol to wear off. This made them accustomed to abstaining from alcohol and trained them to be patient in dealing with this ill that had so thoroughly engulfed their community. Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* waited to seize an opportunity to deal with the issue once and for all. The time came when all the people had to gather to drink some wine. The wine did its work and they began to quarrel among themselves until the conflict eventually grew bloody. Afterward, they, themselves, went to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and questioned him⁽¹⁾:

‘O Messenger of Allah! Would you grant us clear guidelines about the consumption of wine?’ It was at this time that the revelation which contained the definitive ruling concerning intoxicants was revealed: ‘O you who attained to faith! Intoxicants, and games of chance, and idolatrous practices, and divining of the future are but a loathsome evil of Satan’s doing: shun it, then...’ (*al-Ma’ida*: 90).

(1) *On the authority of ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab may Allah be pleased with him who said, ‘O Allah please give us clear-cut directives about wine consumption.’ After this, the verse that appears in chapter of Al-Baqara was revealed: ‘They will ask you about intoxicants and games of chance...’ (al-Baqara: 219] Upon the revelation of this verse, ‘Umar was summoned and it was read aloud to him. When he finished listening to the verse, again he said: ‘O Allah please give us clear-cut directives about wine consumption.’ Subsequently, the verse which appears in an-Nisa” was revealed: ‘O you who have attained unto faith! Do not attempt to pray while you are in a state of drunkenness...’ [4: 43] During this time whoever the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him made responsible for issuing the call to prayer would call out: ‘Do not approach the prayer while you are intoxicated!’ After these new developments, again ‘Umar was called and the latest verses were read aloud to him, and for a third time he commented: ‘O Allah please give us clear-cut directives about wine consumption.’ Following this, the subsequent verse was revealed: ‘O you who attained to faith! Intoxicants, and games of chance, and idolatrous practices, and divining of the future are but a loathsome evil of Satan’s doing...’ (al-Ma’ida: 90] Again, ‘Umar may Allah be pleased with him was called and the verse was read to him until it reached the part which asks: ‘...Will you not, then, desist.” (al-Ma’ida: 91] ‘Umar responded: ‘We have finished.’ Cited by Al-Wahidi An-Naysaburi in Asbab An-Nuzul (p.118)*

The question is: How would this social ill—in which the community was fully engrossed—have been removed and treated if the Quran had been revealed all at once? Indeed, by revealing the Quran in segments, at different times, in accordance with the dictates of context, it is as though the True Lord *the Exalted* was orchestrating a running dialogue between the verses that were being revealed and those who were being affected by them. That is, those who were consistently carrying out the directives mentioned in the verses. At times, this dialogue would become so intense that they (the Companions) would prevail upon the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and question him despite the fact that He had prevented them from meddlesome questioning, as Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘O you who have attained to faith! Do not ask about matters which, if they were to be made manifest to you [in terms of law] might cause you hardship...’ (*al-Ma‘ida*: 101).

Nonetheless, in spite of this, if they were ‘pinched’ by a question, they would immediately ask the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* about it. The Quran spells this out clearly when it says: ‘They will ask you about intoxicants and games of chance...’ (*al-Baqara*: 219). ‘...And they will ask you as to what they should spend [in Allah’s cause]...’ (*al-Baqara*: 219), ‘They will ask you about the new moons...’ (*al-Baqara*: 189), ‘And they will ask you about [what will happen to] the mountains...’ (*Ta Ha*: 105). As such, underlying the revelation of the Quran in segments there is deep and profound wisdom that must be reflected upon. If the Quran had been revealed all at once this wisdom would have been misplaced.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ ءَامِنُوا بِهِ ؕ اَوْ لَا تُؤْمِنُوْا اِنَّ الَّذِيْنَ اُوْتُوا الْعِلْمَ مِنْ قَبْلِهٖ
 اِذَا يُتْلٰى عَلَيْهِمْ يَخِرُّوْنَ لِلْاَذْقَانِ سَجْدًا ﴿١٠٧﴾

Say, ‘Whether you believe it or not, those who were given knowledge earlier fall down on their faces when it is recited to them [107] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 107)

As for the statement of Allah *the Exalted*: ‘Say, “Believe in it or do not believe...”’ (*al-Isra'*: 107), the first clause which begins with the word ‘believe’

is a command and the second clause 'do not believe' is a prohibition. Within Arabic grammar, both the command and the prohibition are considered types of commission (within speech). Linguistically, a command is a particular type of commission that occurs when you request that someone who is your subordinate do something. Prohibition is a specific type of commission that occurs when you command someone who is your subordinate to refrain or desist from doing something. If this linguistic commission occurs but is issued toward someone who is considered your equal or peer, it becomes solicitation. If one commissions someone who is superior or above him in rank the speech-act becomes supplication. For this reason, when we order a student to offer a grammatical analysis of the statement: (Lord forgive me and have mercy upon me!) he will say that 'forgive' is a command verb. To him, we would respond, 'Your understanding of the expression is shallow.' For indeed, although forgive is a command verb, it is being issued by a subordinate to a superior: from the servant to his Lord *the Exalted*. In light of this, we do not refer to it as a command; it is more appropriate that we refer to it as a supplication.

In the strictest linguistic sense, the appropriate response to a command or a prohibition is obedience. However, does this mean that we would be forced to acknowledge that in reference to the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Say, "Believe in it or do not believe..."' (*al-Isra'*: 107) the matter is being put forth as an elective. That is to say, that if people believe they have obeyed Allah's Command and if they do not believe, they have also abided by Allah's Prohibition?

We would respond to that by stating: In this case neither the command nor the prohibition should be taken at face value. On the contrary, what is being intended here is warning, and belief and disbelief have only been equated to make the warning stronger. For instance, this is the same way you would tell your child who you notice has become negligent: Study or choose not to, you are a free man! Of course, it goes without saying that you do not intend to prohibit him from studying. Quite the reverse, what you intend is to threaten him and motivate him to study.

Accordingly, Allah's statement: 'Say: "Believe in it or do not believe..."' (*al-Isra'*: 107) should be understood as equating between believing and

disbelieving. Just as He said: '...let, then, him who wills, believe in it, and let him who wills, reject it.' (*al-Kahf*: 29)

Of course, this is not to be taken as a command which would make believing or disbelieving acts of obedience. Quite the reverse, what is being intended here is to issue a warning which is being done by equating between the two possibilities. So in essence it is really the same whether you believe in it or disbelieve (it stands as the truth all the same). To reinforce this point, the True Lord made this a source of consolation for His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* after he was disheartened by the failure of the people of the Book to attain to faith.

As for the portion of the verse which reads: '...Behold, those who are already endowed with [innate] knowledge...' (*al-Isra'*: 107), it refers to the Jewish and Christian religious communities. These are the two communities which had the benefit of receiving heavenly revelation; indeed, they had listened to the Torah and the Gospel and had conveyed those two scriptures to their contemporaries living at the time of the revelation of the Quran. If anyone could attest to the truth of The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* it would be these people. To be sure, their scriptures—the Torah and the Gospel—contained glad tidings of the advent of his prophecy. On account of this, many of them abandoned their former religions and embraced Islam: this was only because they were certain that Islam was the true faith.

One such person was 'Abdullah ibn-Salam⁽¹⁾. He was one of the scholars of the Jewish community in Medina; he was aware of the characteristics of the coming messenger as well as the time of his advent. This explains why he said, 'In truth, I knew him (Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*) the first time I spotted him. I knew him as well as I knew my own son; in fact, my knowledge of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is more certain than my knowledge of my son⁽²⁾!'

(1) *He is: 'Abdullah ibn-Salam ibn Al-Harith Al-Isra'ili, Abu Yusuf, a Companion of the Prophet. He embraced Islam at the time of the Prophet's arrival to Medina. His former name was Al-Husain, but the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him named him 'Abdullah. He witnessed the conquer of Jerusalem with 'Umar, but remained settled in Medina until he died in year 43 A.H. (al-A'lam, Az-Zirikli 4/90)*

(2) *Allah Glorified is He says: 'They unto whom we have vouchsafed revelation aforetime know it as they know their own children: but behold, some of them knowingly suppress=*

Once Islam had really taken root within his heart, he decided to go to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and declare publicly what he had been feeling—the desire to embrace Islam. He said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, the Jewish community is a community given to lying and falsehood. If I announce my Islam now, they will accuse me of things for which I am not responsible. Ask them about me while they still consider me a member of their religious community and observe their responses.’ So, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* asked them: ‘What do you say about Ibn Salam?’ They answered, ‘He is one of our rabbis and the son of one of our rabbis, and they proceeded to describe him with the most praiseworthy attributes and commendable characteristics.’ Afterward, ‘Abdullah said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, they have said what they said about me, and now I want to declare the testimony of faith: I bear witness that there is nothing worthy of worship besides Allah and I bear witness that you are Allah’s Messenger.’ As he had predicted, after they learned of his conversion to Islam, they denounced him and described him the worst characteristics. He said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, did I tell not you that they were a people given to lying and falsehood.’⁽¹⁾

In the faith of ‘Abdullah ibn-Salam and others from among the Jewish and Christian communities—those who knew the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* by his characteristics which had been mentioned in their scriptures, and knew the time that his advent would occur, and that his call to prophecy was true—there was consolation for the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. In a sense, this helped to offset the negative consequences of his people rejecting him and declaring him a liar. This explains the statement of Allah *the Exalted*:

= the truth’ (*al-Baqara: 146*) *Al-Qurtubi* narrates that: it is related on the authority of ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab may Allah be pleased with him, that he said to ‘Abdullah ibn-Salam, ‘Did you know Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* like you know your own child?’ ‘Yes, in fact, I knew him better’, he continued ‘the trustworthy (the Angel Gabriel *peace be upon him*) in the heavens descended upon the trustworthy (Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*) on earth; and due to his description I recognized him. As for my son, I cannot be one hundred percent sure of what his mother was doing.’ This is what Ibn-Kathir mentioned in his (*Tafsir*) (1/194).

(1) Narrated by *Al-Bukhari* in his *Sahih* (3938) and *Ahmad* in his *Musnad* (3/108, 271, 272) from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of *Anas ibn-Malik* may Allah be pleased with him.

‘And [if] they who are bent on denying the truth say [to you, O Prophet], “You have not been sent [by Allah],” say, “None can bear witness between me and you as Allah does; and [none can bear witness as does] he who truly understands this Book.”’ (*ar-Ra’d*: 43) The acceptance of faith of these former Christians and Jews—who were contemporaries of the Prophet—is enough for us. Indeed, these were people who were true to themselves, their prophets, and the books from which they derived guidance. When their books described Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and gave glad tidings of his advent, they did not deny the characteristics or distort them. Quite the opposite, they hurried to Medina in hope of encountering the new prophet that was supposed to emerge there. They would say to the idolaters of Mecca, ‘For sure, we are awaiting the dawn of a day when a new prophet will arrive and we will follow him in your midst. With him as our leader we will vanquish you as the peoples of ‘Ad and Iram were vanquished (cursed people who disobeyed the Messengers sent to them).’ ‘...whenever there came unto them something which they recognized [as the truth], they would deny it. And Allah’s rejection is due to all who deny the truth.’ (*al-Baqara*: 89) In spite of this, Allah did not allow the truth to completely wither away; He maintained its nucleus and made it the catalyst that propelled them to respond to the Messenger of Allah’s invitation to explore the new faith.

The statement of Allah *the Exalted*: ‘...as soon as this [Book] is conveyed unto them.’ (*al-Isra'*: 107) is a reference to the Quran. The phrase ‘...fall upon their faces in prostration...’ indicates that they rush to prostrate (after hearing the Quran): their prostration is motivated by the sheer emotional force of the scripture, not because they have consciously decided to do so. Simply by hearing the Quran, they fall to the ground in prostration. Can this be for any reason beside the fact that they have been emotionally affected by it and that faith has begun to take root in their souls? What is more is that they do not simply fall in prostration; they fall upon their chins (*adhqan*) in prostration. The chin is the lowest point on the face, but it is well known that prostration is customarily performed on the forehead. As for those being mentioned in the verse, they prostrate upon their faces—the entire face! This is a sign of how thoroughly they have submitted and humbled themselves before Allah.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَيَقُولُونَ سُبْحَانَ رَبِّنَا إِن كَانَ وَعْدُ رَبِّنَا لَمَفْعُولًا ﴿١٠٨﴾

And say, “Glory to our Lord! Our Lord’s promise has been fulfilled” [108] (The Quran, *al-Isra’*: 108)

This is what they say while prostrating: Limitless in His glory is our Lord who has fulfilled what He promised in the Torah and the Gospel. Indeed, He has sent The Final Messenger and has given him the Quran. He is limitless in His glory! He has brought the promise that He made to us to fruition, we recognize him, and we believe in him. It is as though they are praising Allah for this blessing.

After this, the True Lord says concerning them:

وَيَخْرُجُونَ لِلْأَذْقَانِ يَبْكُونَ وَيَزِيدُهُمْ خُشُوعًا ﴿١٠٩﴾

They fall down on their faces, weeping, and [the Quran] increases their humility [109] (The Quran, *al-Isra’*: 109)

They had fallen upon their faces in prostration to Allah because they had come to terms with the Quran which was revealed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In him, they realized that the promise of Allah had been fulfilled so they aided him and believed in him. This time however, they are falling upon their faces in prostration as a result of what they heard of the Quran—once they heard some of the details of its contents—and the way they were affected by it. The second instance of prostrating contains a heightened sense of emotion—because it was after hearing the Quran. This is why the additional descriptions of their weeping and increased humility are mentioned here. Allah *Glorified is He* says: “And so they fall down upon their faces, weeping...” (*al-Isra’*: 109) that is to say: Every time they read a verse their devotion and humility before Allah increases.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ اَدْعُوا اللَّهَ اَوْ اَدْعُوا الرَّحْمٰنَ اَيًّا مَّا تَدْعُوْا فَلَهُ الْاَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنٰى
وَلَا تَجْهَرْ بِصَلَاتِكَ وَلَا تُخَافِتْ بِهَا وَابْتَغِ بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ سَبِيْلًا ﴿١١٠﴾

Say [to them], ‘Call on God, or on the Lord of Mercy – whatever names you call Him, the best names belong to Him.’ [Prophet], do not be too loud in your prayer, or too quiet, but seek a middle way [110] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 110)

‘Say, invoke Allah...’ Mention Allah, call on Him, or request Him. The word Allah is the proper name of the Deity: He *Glorified is He* whose Existence is absolutely necessary. When the Word God or Allah is used, each can only refer to that Entity whose Existence is absolutely necessary, The True Lord. In the same way, we name people if a name is used; it refers to the individual that is called by that name.

Within our nomenclature there are many types of names: Common names, surnames, nicknames, etc. As for common names, they are the most familiar; each time a child is born he/she is given a common name and is henceforth referred to by that name. In terms of surnames, they are also given to a person, but they usually begin with *Abu*, *Um*, *Ibn*, or *Bint*; for example, the names Abu-Bakr and Umm Al-Mu’minin. A nickname, on the other hand, represents a description of the person to whom it is assigned; whether a praiseworthy trait is being described or one worthy of blame. For example, we use the names: as-Siddiq, ash-Sha’ir, al-Faruq.

If a person shares a name with someone else, one must add an additional description to his name when referring to him, i.e., the way a person might be accustomed to referring to all his children as Muhammad. In such a situation, a name ceases to perform its intended function of singling out a particular person. As a result, we must describe each of them with a description that makes him distinct from all the others. So we would say for example, Big Muhammad, Little Muhammad, or even Muhammad the Engineer. In this way, whenever the name is used (with its additional description) it will be taken as a reference to a particular person.

So, as opposed to our practice which is to name our children, the True Lord *Glorified is He* assigns names to Himself. These are the names which are

referred to as the Most Beautiful Names (*al-Asma' al-Husna*) the word *husna* is a noun on the linguistic pattern of '*af' al* which expresses superlative meaning in feminine nouns. A commonly used word of the same type is the adjective *kubra*. If one wanted to express an identically superlative meaning but did so within a masculine noun, the word *Ahsan* would be used instead of *husna*. The question, however, is: Why did Allah describe His names with the word *husna*?

In the Arabic language, the purpose of a noun is to shed light upon the thing to which it refers. The only thing is that within human beings a name might not be an accurate description of the one to which it refers. We might name someone *sa'id* (happy) but he might be unhappy or we may call a person *dhaki* (smart) while he, in fact, is dim-witted. This variance between the names and the things to which they refer reflects a lack of beauty (*husn*) in the naming of these objects. Beauty in naming occurs when the name is in complete accord with the reality of the thing to which it refers. In fact, the more the person being referred to with the name reflects, and embodies the quality the name denotes, the more beautiful the name becomes. In other words, the person we name *sa'id* should actually be *sa'id* (happy)!

With suitability, a name becomes beautiful (*hasan*). Nonetheless, it still does not arrive at the highest level of beauty; indeed, the highest level of beauty (within the act of naming) is reserved for the names of Allah, those with which He has named Himself. The names of Allah are of unlimited perfection. As such, these names do not contain the inconsistency that the names of human beings contain. As we mentioned, in many instances a person might be named '*adil* (just), yet he might be oppressive or someone might be called '*sharif* (noble) while he is ignoble. This explains why we say: After associating partners with Allah, the worst act of wrongdoing is for something to betray its name.

So the street 'Imad Ad-Din (pillar of the faith) is so named, but the stubborn rejection of the faith has been its claim to fame.

At times, a name can oppress the one to which it refers. The lines above attempt to capture one such instance: There was once a street named 'Imad Ad-Din that had been known as headquarters for debauchery and dissolution. In the past, there was no place less deserving of the name 'Imad Ad-Din!

In terms of the noblest utterance, the Name of Allah, as we mentioned, it is a name that denotes an entity whose existence is absolutely necessary. After this is established, the names and attributes that refer to this Entity are reserved for Him and cannot be used in reference to anyone or anything else. So, for example, when we say the Almighty (*al-'Aziz*) this can only be taken to refer to Allah. Yet, it remains allowable to say: So and so is *al-'Aziz* among his people; so and so is *ar-Rahim* (The Dispenser of Mercy) to whoever is in his company; so and so is *an-Nafi'* (The Bestower of Benefit) to anyone who contacts him. Nonetheless, if we simply mention the 'Bestower of Benefit' without qualifying the statement beyond that, it could only refer to the True Lord *Glorified is He*.

In light of this, the attributes of Allah have the same status as the proper name of the Divine Essence (Allah). Indeed, if the proper name either of the Divine Essence or any of Allah's attributes is mentioned, in isolation without further qualification, they will be taken as referring exclusively to Allah *the Exalted*. The Most Beautiful Names of Allah then, are, in the deepest sense, His attributes.

If we think deeply about these attributes we find them of two types: Names that describe some essential aspects of the Lord and names which describe one of His acts. Any name that describes an essential aspect of Allah negates the possibility of Him being described with its opposite. So, the attribute and name The Almighty (*al-'Aziz*) describes an essential aspect of Allah, this means that He could never be described by its opposite: powerlessness (*adh-dhalil*). Likewise, the attribute and name the Living *al-hayy* describes an essential aspect of Allah, so we could not describe Him with its opposite: death. On the other hand, the names which describe Allah's acts do have opposites. For instance, Allah is the Exalter (*al-Mu'izz*) which means that He raises or exalts people and things as He chooses. The Name the Humiliator (*al-Mudhill*)—also one of Allah's names—is its opposite. The same can be said of *ad-darr* (The Inflictor of Harm), it is the opposite of *an-Nafi'*. Likewise, Allah is *al-Muhyi* (The One Who Grants Life), but He is also *al-Mumit* (The one who causes death) and so on. In the final analysis, know that if you find that one of the names of Allah is accompanied by a name which describes it opposite, it is a name denoting one of His actions. Conversely, if you find

that the name does not have an opposite know that it refers to some aspect of Allah.

Yet, consider a Divine Name describing an action such as The One Characterized by Concealment (as-Sattar or as-Sittir). Why is there no opposite Divine Name for this attribute? We do not say The One Who Exposes (*al-Faddah*) because Allah wants His creation to demonstrate this positive character trait and to foster the attribute of concealing the faults of people. For if people discover one shameful fact about an individual, they tend to reject everything from that individual, even anything good. This deprives the community from a lot of benefit. Alternatively, when you conceal someone's shortcomings, you give the entire community the opportunity to benefit from the good in them. When Allah is disobeyed, He loves for the disobedience of His servant to remain concealed, so that everyone can continue to benefit from others in life. After all, nobody is perfect in his traits except for the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. Indeed, the following was spoken truthfully:

Who is it? Who never wronged?

Who is it? Who only has goodness in scroll?

Thus out of His eternal wisdom, Allah orders us to conceal the faults of others: this facilitates unhindered development within life. Also, hearts change quickly, if I learn something about you that you regard as private and would rather keep concealed, it would probably affect the way I interact with you and you would subsequently change the way you interacted with me and we would run the risk of having the ties of friendship severed. On the other hand, by concealment and respecting privacy, we continue to benefit from each other.

This explains why they say: *If your faults were to be uncovered, you would not dig the graves of one another*. If everyone's secrets become exposed and everyone knows the other's 'dirty laundry', then who will bury the deceased; this represents absolute estrangement between community members.

So, when Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say [to them], 'Call upon Allah' (*al-Isra*': 110). Note that the name Allah has been chosen as the proper name

for the Absolute Cause. Although this name does not denote a particular attribute, it embodies all most perfect attributes. Other names have specific domains: The Omnipotent (*al-Qadir*) expresses capability, The All-Wise (*al-Hakim*) expresses wisdom, The One Who Seizes (*al-Qabid*) relates to the ability to take away souls and possessions, the Almighty (*al-'Aziz*) relates to strength or might, etc. While every name has a certain context, the name Allah encompasses all attributes.

This is highlighted in the following prophetic Hadith, 'Everything that does not begin with the Name of Allah is maimed.'⁽¹⁾ Why? Because when you undertake an action, you need to start with the wisdom behind this task. Then, you need the capability to perform it. And you need knowledge of the expected outcomes. So, you need many attributes. Nonetheless, when you begin an action you do not need to individually seek the help of the All-Wise, and the Omnipotent, and the Omniscient. Allah *the Exalted* makes it easy on you by making it sufficient to simply say 'In the Name of Allah' before engaging in any action. By that you have mentioned the name that encompasses all faultless attributes.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...or call upon the Most Merciful...' (*al-Isra'*: 110). Here He mentions the Most Merciful (*ar-Rahman*) as opposed to mentioning the Compeller (*al-jabbar*) or the Irresistible (*al-qahhar*) because mercy (*rahma*) is the attribute of gentleness to creation. Allah *the Exalted* highlights this attribute and makes it the focal point for His servants' relationship with Him even in His names the Compeller or the Irresistible. In fact, these qualities also serve as a warning. Knowing that Allah has attributes like compulsion, total strength, and retribution, a servant will always be cautious not to fall under the wrath of such attributes (by being disobedient). Similarly, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Fair retribution saves life for you, people of understanding, so that you may guard yourselves against what is wrong.' (*al-Baqara*: 179)

Then, a potential killer will refrain from killing knowing that it would cost him his own life, as in the Arabic saying, 'Killing is the best prevention of

(1) Narrated by Ahmad in his *Musnad* (2: 359) on the authority of Abu Hurayra that the Messenger of Allah said, 'Every important speech or matter that does not begin with the remembrance of Allah is maimed.' Or He said: '...is severed.'

killing.' As such, the legislation of the law of retribution and the establishment of the divinely sanctioned punishments are not abuse. They are merciful in that they deter men and women from committing crimes that would necessitate such retributive capital punishment or any other divinely sanctioned punishment. Mercy is given even to someone vanquished by Allah, since Allah has been warning: I am the Compeller, fear me. In that He is merciful because He is warning His servants from committing what would lead to His displeasure and retribution.

Another reason for choosing the name the Most Merciful (*ar-Rahman*) is because mercy underlies all commandments. The Way of Allah has been sent down to arrange people's affairs and secure their happiness as they move through life. This enables different elements of creation to compliment, cooperate with, and assist one another as opposed to combat one another. The goal of the Divine Way is to unite the Muslim community and ensure its peaceful living.

The sacred law is overwhelmingly characterised by 'divine mercy', it is the general trend. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'The Most Merciful. Taught the Quran.' (*ar-Rahman*: 1-2) The Quran was revealed to arrange worldly affairs and provide a criterion to gauge them. It creates peace between you and your Creator, yourself and your fellow humans. Thus the Quran is a manifestation of 'divine mercy'.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Which, then, of your Lord's blessings would you both (jinn and mankind) deny?' (*ar-Rahman*: 13) Some oriental scholars have criticized that this verse which appears repeatedly in the chapter of *ar-Rahman* (The Most Merciful) is also appending the following verse, where Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'A flash of fire and smoke will be released upon you and no one will come to your aid!' (*ar-Rahman*: 35). How can a verse about fire and smoke be preceded and concluded by a verse about blessings? Had those scholars given it more thought, they would not have objected because warning from the flash of fire and smoke is a blessing. The Quran is basically saying: Beware of what would lead to suffering from fire and smoke, deterring you immediately from such action. Is that not one of Allah's blessings bestowed upon His slaves and mercy towards them? What would you say if Allah *Glorified is He* had surprised you with torment without having warned you of it?

There is another subtle meaning to the use of Allah's name the Most Merciful (*ar-Rahman*). Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and then established Himself above the Throne— He is the Most Merciful! Ask, then about Him, [the] One who is [truly] informed.' (*al-Furqan*: 59) After having created the entire creation—the heavens, the earth and all that is in them, He established Himself on the throne⁽¹⁾, which indicates that all creation has been perfected. A king does not sit on his throne until he gains complete power and command free from opposition. '...and then established Himself above the Throne— He is the Most Merciful!' (*al-Furqan*: 59).

Allah chose the attribute of mercy to reassure us that His mounting the throne does not entail oppression or merciless dominance. It is a mercy He mounts the throne to organize our lives and to bless us by making us show mercy to one another. So, it is a mounting for the best interest of creation that implies mercy and grace.

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'The Most Merciful, established on the throne.' (*Ta Ha*: 5) Establishing Himself on the throne *the Exalted* has been mentioned seven times throughout the Quran. They have been listed in a short poem:

Allah's ascending of the throne has been mentioned in seven locations of His Speech, let's count:

In the Chapter of *al-A'araf*, then in *Yunus* and *ar-R'ad* followed by *Ta Ha*: make sure to count

In the Chapter of *al-Furqan*, then *as-Sajda*, and lastly *al-Hadid*: now get the total amount.

Every attribute describing His Majesty serves 'divine mercy.' He frightens His servants with His majestic attributes so they would not succumb to disobedience and may enjoy Allah's blessings in this life and in the Hereafter. In conclusion, mercy supersedes all other attributes of Allah and represents

(1) Translator's comment: Allah establishes Himself on the throne or sits firmly on it in a manner that suits His Majesty. It is beyond human understanding and far from resembling any of His creation *Glorified and Exalted is He*.

the fundamental characteristic of His Way in this worldly life and in the Hereafter. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'On the last night of *Ramadan* the Compeller grants forgiveness...' ⁽¹⁾ Notice that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* did not say the All-Forgiving grants forgiveness; why did he prefer the attribute of compelling when forgiveness is the topic? It is said that forgiveness is only necessary when an act of disobedience has been committed. Disobedience warrants punishment which conforms to the Compeller. But did the attribute of forgiveness overcome that of compelling and take over its speciality? No, the Forgive intercedes with the Compeller. Allah's character Name the Compeller is thus in control; however, we ask of You (Compeller) to allow your attribute of forgiveness to intercede for them. It is as though the attributes of beauty intercede with the attributes of majesty.

Therefore, scholars of the Prophetic saying (Hadith) explain: believers will intercede, then Prophets will intercede, then Angels will intercede, and then the intercession of the Most Merciful of all merciful ⁽²⁾ begins. But with

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- (1) *It is narrated on the authority of Jabir ibn 'Abdullah that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings upon him, said: 'My nation has been given five things in the month of Ramadan, which no previous prophet had: First, on the first night of Ramadan Allah the Exalted and High looks at them. And Allah will never punish whoever He looks upon...; fifth, when it is the last night, Allah forgives them all.' a man from among the people then asked: 'Are you referring to the Night of Power?' The Messenger, peace and blessings upon him, responded: 'No! Have you not seen how workers collect their wages when they finish work.' In his book At-Tarhib wa at-Tarhib (2/65) Al-Munthiri says: "Al-Bayhaqi cited a similar chain of narrators".*
- (2) *A long Hadith (Prophetic saying) on the authority of Abu Bakr As-Siddiq states that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings upon him, said: 'Everything happening in this life and in the Here-after has been displayed upon me. Everything that ever lived in the world since its beginning to its end will be summoned...' Until he finally said 'Then it will be said: 'Call the truthful and the righteous forward for intercession. Then it will be said' 'Now call the Prophets forward; and a Prophet would come forth with a band (of followers); another would only be followed by five or six people, and a Prophet will come forth alone. Then, it will be said: call forth the martyrs to intercede for whomever they want. After the martyrs finish their intercession, Allah will say: 'I am the Most Merciful among the merciful; let anyone who did not associate partners with me enter my Paradise.' So, they enter paradise. Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (1/4). It was also recorded by Haythamy in Al-Majma' (10/374) as well as by As-Suyuty in Al-Budur As-Safira fi umur Al-Akhirah (pg.119).*

whom will the Most Merciful among the merciful intercede? They explain that He will intercede with Himself that Allah's attribute of beauty (The All-Forgiving) will intercede with His attribute of majesty (The Compeller) *the Glorified and Exalted*.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'Say [to them], 'Call upon Allah, or call upon the Most Merciful– whichever [name] you call-to Him belong the best names...' (*al-Isra'*: 110). Therefore, it really does not matter which name you invoke Him by because all His names are perfect. Nonetheless, you should invoke Allah with the attribute that best fulfils your need. So, for instance, if it is knowledge that you pursue, you should say: O All Knowing, grant me knowledge! When you are weak say: O Strong One, strengthen me! If you desire honour and might, you should call out: O Almighty, grant me might and honour! Yet, you can simply say in short: O Allah! In any situation it will suffice.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...And do not be too loud in your prayer nor hushed therein, and seek a way in-between that.' (*al-Isra'*: 110) Here the word prayer encompasses every action within the prayer. In terms of 'do not be too loud', it indicates that raising your voice unnecessarily in prayer is prohibited. However, by the same token, Allah says: 'nor hushed therein', i.e. do not pray in such a low voice that those praying behind you are incapable of hearing you. Praying in this manner is also prohibited. Thus the two extremes are disliked, and moderation is always desirable (the Golden Mean). I believe that since it is prohibited to raise one's voice too loudly in prayer, then it goes without saying that shouting out one's prayer in a microphone and the like is equally inappropriate. These devices distract people.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'So, when the Quran is recited, then listen to it and pay attention, that you may receive mercy.' (*al-A'raf*: 204) So, by raising your voice with the Quran, even more so by using a microphone, you make everyone responsible for listening. By that, you either have them fall into sin or prevent them from taking care of their personal business. Perhaps someone else is attempting to recite the Quran too, or to ask Allah forgiveness, or to praise Him or pray during that time. How could you turn your recommended action into a compulsion for others? This is not permissible! Leave others alone, free to do as they choose. You certainly do not want to be among those

whom Allah *Glorified is He* has described: 'Say: "Shall We inform you of the greatest losers in (their) deeds?" Those whose efforts have been wasted in this worldly life, while they thought that they were acquiring good by their deeds' (*al-Kahf*: 103-104). This is like those who go around using a microphone before the dawn prayer and start singing random songs that are not part of any verses, just disturbing the ill and being inconsiderate to others. When will Muslims wake up, and look critically at such heterodoxy that disturbs people and spoils their worship?

Even worse, if raising the voice while reciting the Quran is done for a living or to attain some worldly aim, and recitation turns into a display of vocal styling and a field in which to compete, such people have entered a totally different category of sin by using religion for worldly gains, and we ask Allah's protection for ourselves and for you from such sinful behaviour.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and seek a way in-between that.' (*al-Isra'*: 110) Seek a way between the two extremes of a voice too loud or too low; follow the way of moderation: the way which characterises the divine law. The Messenger of Allah, *peace and blessings upon him*, demonstrates the practical application of this principle. When checking on the Companions one night, he found Abu Bakr reciting in a voice barely heard. When he asked him why, Abu Bakr responded, 'I am engaged in an intimate dialogue with my Lord, and He knows everything about me.' Then when the Messenger of Allah, *peace and blessings upon him*, went to 'Umar, he found him reciting in a very loud voice, so he asked him why, and 'Umar responded, 'O Messenger of Allah, I am repelling Satan with my recitation.' The Messenger of Allah, *peace and blessings upon him*, ordered Abu Bakr to slightly raise his voice and 'Umar to slightly lower it⁽¹⁾.

(1) *Mohamad ibn Sirin said: It has been narrated that Abu Bakr used to pray in a very low voice and that 'Umar used to raise his voice in prayer. Abu Bakr was asked, 'Why do you do so?' He responded, 'I am engaged in intimate dialogue with my Lord, and He knows what I need.' He was told, 'Well done'. When the same question was posed to 'Umar, he responded, 'I ward off Satan and call the drowsy to attention.' He was also praised, 'Well done'. After the verse was revealed: "...And do not be too loud in your prayer nor hushed therein, and seek a way between that." (al-Isra': 110) Abu Bakr was told to slightly raise his voice and 'Umar was told to slightly lower it. (This is an excerpt from Tafsir ibn Kathir 3/69).*

This moderation and balance are characteristics that we are commanded to observe even in supplication, as Allah says: 'And remember your Lord inwardly, in all humility and awe without raising your voice' (*al-A'raf*: 205).

Moderation, expressed by '...in-between that' (*al-Isra'*: 110) describes every ruling upon which our religious lives are based. In fact, the Quran itself has been revealed upon a nation which adopts the path of moderation in its affairs: religious as well as worldly. Within matters of belief, for example, Islam adopts a middle course; it rejects the claims that there is no God and the claim of the existence of many gods. Islam rejects both extremes as misguidance and establishes the presence of one unique and indivisible God who is without partners.

When discussing spending, Islam again chooses the way of moderation and balance; Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'They are those who are neither wasteful nor niggardly when they spend, but keep to a just mean between those [two extremes]' (*al-Furqan*: 67). This moderate economy succeeds in enriching one's own life as an individual, as well as community life. The whole of this approach to spending is summed up where Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And let not your hand be tied (like a miser) to your neck, nor stretch it forth to its utmost limit (like a spendthrift), lest you become blameworthy and insolvent.' (*al-Isra'*: 29) The close-fisted miser who refuses to spend money causes economic stagnation and hinders community endeavours, which is a threat to the entire community. On the other hand, extravagant spending represents a threat to the individual. If someone spends all their possessions, they do not spare anything to elevate their living standard. Thus, this wise choice of moderate spending saves the individual from ending up blameworthy for not spending or insolvent and incapable of raising living standards like responsible people.

Finally, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقُلِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي لَمْ يَتَّخِذْ وَلَدًا وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ شَرِيكٌ فِي
 الْمُلْكِ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ وَلِيٌّ مِنَ الذَّلِيلِ وَكَبِيرَةٌ تَكْبِيرًا

And say, 'Praise belongs to God, who has no child nor partner in His rule. He is not so weak as to need a protector. Proclaim His limitless greatness!' [111] (The Quran, *al-Isra'*: 111)

Who is being praised in this verse? Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...who has not taken a son...' (*al-Isra'*: 111). The fact that Allah has not taken a son is a great blessing for His creation, for which they should praise Him. Had He taken a son, His son would receive all or more of His care. Allah, however, is simply above having a son, and all His creation are His dependents. Thus, we are all equal in receiving care from our Lord, none being His son or having any close kinship ties to Him. But the most beloved among Allah's creations is the most pious of them.

Then again, what is the underlying reason that people want to have a child? There are two main reasons why people want children: The first is the continuity of the father's lineage after his death. A poet gives reference to this: My son; you are myself after I have expired

Allah Who is immortal and everlasting does not need anyone to carry on His legacy or to continue His lineage *the Glorified and Exalted*. All praise to Him Who has not taken a son. The second reason for which people want to have a child is to increase their strength by having a group around them and to compensate for personal weakness. Allah, however, is the Almighty, the Irresistible and so He does not need a group or anyone to increase His strength. Therefore, Allah commands us to glorify Him: He has not taken unto Himself a son or a partner. Note that either the sons or the partners of most kings and rulers are behind their corruption and injustice.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and has no partner in [His] dominion...' (*al-Isra'*: 111). This is also a blessing for which we should thank and praise Allah. Imagine what it would be like if Allah had a partner in His dominion. We would have been continuously confused not knowing which partner to obey and who to please.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '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? ...' (*az-Zumar*: 29).

There is a known quote that 'A ship with two captains sinks'. The fact that Allah is One and has no partners alleviates all worries, since His commands are effectuated with no objection. There is no other god to give you contradicting orders. Is that not a blessing that necessitates praising Allah?

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* also says: '...and has no need of a protector (*wali*) out of weakness...' (*al-Isra'*: 111). The word (*wali*) -translated here as 'protector' refers to someone who handles affairs on your behalf. Surely you would only entrust your affairs to someone who you believe can secure a particular benefit or warding off harm, assisting you when confronting an adversary or strengthening one of your weaknesses. If you do not possess the ability to actualize your goals, you enlist the service of someone who does. A Protector (*wali*) has the same root as loyalty (*walaa'*) because when you seek protection from someone, you naturally develop a sense of loyalty toward them. Allah *Glorified is He* does not have a (*wali*) to whom He resorts because He is the Almighty and the Exalter; He is not in need of anyone.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* concludes by saying: '...and glorify Him (*say Allahu akbar*) with [great] glorification.' (*al-Isra'*: 111)

In the heart of a believer nothing is more treasured or honoured than Allah. That is why 'Allah is the Greatest' (*Allahu akbar*) is the phrase for the call to and the commencing of prayer. One must truly glorify Allah more than anything in life, so when He summons you at any time, your response should be: Allah is greater than what I am currently doing. Even if He summons you while you are in the presence of a great person, you must know and remember in your heart: Allah is greater than any great person. Also, glorify Him with great glorification (*say Allahu akbaru kabeera*) by giving His commandments and prohibitions precedence over any other rules set by anyone else in life.

Now do not forget that by glorifying Allah you gain from His glory yourself, and that is granted only to those who have purified their worship to Allah. So, unlike the humiliating slavery to man, being a slave to Allah is a

great honour, since the slave of Allah benefits from His master's bounties, unlike a slave to a human being where the master reaps the benefits off the slave's hard work. As the poet says:

There is great honour for me in being a slave, for without appointment, I enjoy my Lord's reception.

In His holiness, He is the greater one, yet I get to choose the time and place of our meeting.

How difficult it is and sometimes impossible to get to meet a prominent person in life, whereas with Allah, the Lord of Honour, all you need is to have faith in Him and you get to meet Him anytime and anywhere you like and complain or ask whatever you need. What greater honour is there?

Therefore, what dignifies the Messenger of Allah the most during the Night Journey and Ascension (*al-Isra' wa al-M'iraj*) is his description as a slave to Allah, who *Glorified is He*, says 'Exalted is He who took His slave for a journey by night from the Sacred place of worship (*Al-Masjid Al-Alaqa*) [at Mecca] to the Remote place of worship (*Al-Masjid Al-Haram*) [at Jerusalem]...' (*al-Isra'*: 1).

All honour is in being a slave to Allah and in prostrating to Him. In fact, slavery to Allah and prostration to Him prevent one from being enslaved by anyone else. A poet says: The prostration you loath is your salvation from thousands other prostrations.

Therefore, glorify Allah and proclaim His majesty and know that He is the only true refuge. Whoever seeks refuge with Allah is in His Company and greatly benefits from His attributes. Moreover, Allah protects His Company from the evil plots of their enemies and from their oppression. Previously, we gave the example of a child who might be bullied by his peers when alone; whereas, if he is accompanied by his father, no one would dare to bully him.

Thus, we must remain in the presence of Our Lord if we wish to experience lasting, unlimited safety. Nonetheless, we must keep in mind that Allah may test those in His Company, but only to draw them even closer to Him, as though He is saying: I am testing you by depriving you of one of my blessings so you

may focus on Me—and nothing else, not even My blessing. While a healthy person is accompanied by Allah's blessings, an agonised person is in the company of Allah Himself.

Did Allah not say in a Qudsi Hadith: 'Son of Adam, I was sick but you failed to visit Me.' The person replies, 'How can I visit you when you are the Lord of the worlds?' Allah responds, 'Did you not know that my slave so and so was sick and you failed to visit him. Did you not know that if you had visited him, you would have found Me with him?'⁽¹⁾

A sick person is always delighted to receive visitors who alleviate some of the pain and suffering he or she endures. Well, if a diseased were to really enjoy the company of Allah and feel His benevolence, I swear by the One God other than whom there is nothing worthy of worship he or she would never feel the pangs of illness. Therefore, such believers are too humble to complain about their pain and never despair no matter how severe the affliction gets. How could they be tormented by the pains of illness and how could they ever despair when they are experiencing the company of Allah?

So, glorify Him with great glorification: Place His Commandments and Prohibitions above all else. Know that: Allah is greater than anything great, even Paradise. Repeat it to yourself: Allah is greater than Paradise. Remember the famous quote by Rabi'a Al-'Adawiyya⁽²⁾:

Everyone worships You out of fear of the Fire and views salvation as the best prize.

Or they desire to eternally dwell in gardens, live in castles and drink from Salsabil.

As for me, I do not care about gardens or fire; for my Love cannot be substituted.

(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2569); it is from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra.*

(2) She is: Rabi'a bint Isma'il Al-'Adawiyya, Um Al-Khair, The client of the Basrian 'Atik clan. She was famous for her piety among the people of Basra, where she was born. Much has been said about her dedication in worship and asceticism. She died in Jerusalem 135 A.H. (Al-A'alam 3/10, Az-Zirikli).

In a Qudsi Hadith, Allah says: 'If I had not created Paradise and Fire, would I not still be worthy of worship?' No doubt that Allah, the Great is greater than everything, including Paradise. At the end of chapter 18, i.e. the chapter of *al-Kahf*, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Therefore, whoever hopes to meet his Lord, he should do good deeds, and not join anyone in the worship of his Lord!' (*al-Kahf*: 110)

Notice that Allah did not say: whoever hopes to receive the 'reward of his Lord', or 'the Paradise of his Lord', or 'the bliss from his Lord'. That is because the goal of a true believer is not comfort and luxury, but the goal is to meet the Dispenser of comfort and luxury. In another Qudsi Hadith, Allah *Glorified is He* says to the angels: 'Have you seen My servants? I bestow this and that blessing upon them and when I take away a blessing from them, they love Me all the same'.

And that concludes the chapter of *al-Isra'*. Allah *Glorified is He* ends this chapter with a reminder of three important blessings among His countless blessings. These three blessings are on top of the list of things for which we need to praise Him.

1. All praise is to Allah who has not taken unto Himself a son. He does not beget children nor was He begotten and He is One and Unique.
2. All praise is to Allah who has no partner in His dominion because He is One.
3. And all praise is to Allah who is not in need of any form of aid from anyone because He is the All-Dominant, the Almighty, the Exalter.

Therefore, we must glorify Allah (*Allahu akbar*) with every blessing that He bestows upon us.

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