

vol. [18]

REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY
الشعر اوان

فواطـر

المجلد [18]



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

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AL HOŞN RESEARCH & STUDIES CENTRE

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info@alhosnuae.ae

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the chapter of

ar-Rum

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



Alif. Lam. Mim [1] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 1)

‘*Alif. Lam. Mim.*’ We have spoken much about the separate letters with which certain chapters begin. I do not wish to repeat what we have said. However, I do wish for the scholars to consider this matter in an illuminating way that shows and reveals to us all the wisdom and secrets within these letters

We have said that these three letters, ‘*Alif. Lam. Mim*’ are recited separately with a pause between each letter and the following one. However, the Quran recitation is generally based on continuation and connection between its verses and chapters; that is the last letter of one chapter is connected in recitation to the first letter of the next chapter. For example, when ending the recitation of the previous chapter and starting this chapter, we say: ‘But as for those who strive hard in Our cause – We shall most certainly guide them onto paths that lead unto Us, for, behold, Allah is indeed with the doers of good. In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy....’

Moreover, *an-Nas*, the final chapter of the Quran, is connected to the chapter of *al-Fatiha*, the first chapter. So, when we want to continue reciting from the chapter of *an-Nas* to the chapter of *al-Fatiha*, we read: ‘From amongst the jinn and mankind.’ and then follow with ‘In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy. All Praise is due to Allah alone, the Sustainer of all the worlds’.

Thus, the Quran is circularly connected, not broken up. So, why are the separate letters at the beginning of certain chapters pronounced with pauses?

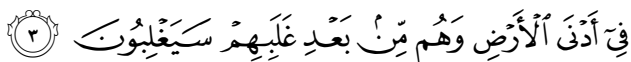
Why do we not say, ‘*Alifun Lamun Mimun*’, with the nominative case marking? The scholars say it is because Allah did not want to make these letters a single word, and so they were revealed with pauses. We are comforted by the Hasith of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* saying: ‘I do not say that *Alif Lam Mim* are all one letter, but rather, *Alif* is a letter, and *Lam* is a letter and *Mim* is a letter.’⁽¹⁾ And so we are waiting for someone, of those who worship Allah excellently and do good deeds, to tell us what secrets these letters contain that must be paused at, and not connected to anything else.

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



**The Byzantines have been defeated [2]
(The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 2)**

The word ‘Defeated’ implies that there was a battle where one army was victorious, and the other was defeated. Here, it was the Byzantines who were defeated. They were from the people of the Book based in the Levant and the Arabian Iraq, as Iraq had two parts, one of which is towards the Arab peninsula and the other towards the Persians. The Arabic word for Byzantines is *ar-Rum*, and they are said to be descended from Rum, son of Yeshu, son of Ishaq (Issac) son of Ibrahim (Abraham).



**In a nearby land. They will reverse their defeat
with a victory [3] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 3)**

‘In the lands close-by...’ means the nearest of lands to the Arabs, This is similar to the verse: ‘when you were at the near end of the valley [of Badr], and they were at its farthest end...’ (*al-Anfal*: 42). The ‘near end’ here means the one closest to Medina, while the ‘far end’ means the one furthest from it. So, ‘the lands close-by...’ (*ar-Rum*: 3), means the lands closest to the Arabian Peninsula.

(1) Narrated by At-Tirmidhi on the authority of Abu Hurayra

The part of the verse saying ‘...yet it is they who, notwithstanding this, their defeat, shall be victorious’ (*ar-Rum: 3*) was a glad tidings to the believers because the Persians were fire-worshippers while the Byzantines were people of the Book. So, the difference between us and the Persians is in the doctrine of divinity, while the difference between us and the Byzantines is in the doctrine of the prophecy and mission of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Therefore, they were closer to us because they believed in Allah, but not in our Messenger.

This is part of the greatness of Islam; those who believe in Allah are closer to us than those who do not because the former are at least connected to Him. Thus, when the Byzantines were defeated, the idolaters of Quraysh rejoiced and the believers mourned. The idolaters of Quraysh rejoiced because the defeat of the Byzantines seemed to show that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his followers would be defeated in the same way.

The word ‘their defeat’ is translated from the Arabic word *ghalabihim* which is formed from the attachment of the infinitive *ghalab* (defeat) to the Arabic pronoun ‘*him*’ (their). In Arabic, this infinitive is sometimes attached to a subject and others to an object. This may be similar to the gerund when you say, ‘I liked the ruler’s flogging the criminal’, you have attributed the gerund to the active agent (the ruler); if you say, ‘I liked the criminal’s flogging’, you have attributed the gerund to the passive agent (the criminal). Likewise, ‘defeat’ here is attached to the object pronoun referring the Byzantines.

But why did Allah *Glorified is He* say, ‘...shall be victorious’ (*ar-Rum: 3*) using the particle *sa* in Arabic which implies the future tense, and then say ‘within a few years’, which also implies the future tense? The scholars said that it is because victory does not come out of the blue, but rather, it is the result of long preparations, and seeking the necessary means and preparing the force necessary to accomplish it. It is as though they would, in these few years, prepare for victory, and every finished part of preparation is a step closer to the final victory. That is to say that victory would not come merely after a few years, but as a result from work continuing for many years.

Germany, for example, was defeated in the First World War when all nations joined forces to oppose him. Then, in 1939, its Leader Hitler had

declared war on the world. Had the force which he used to threaten them with simply been an act of magic? No, rather, he spent years preparing, and forming his army, and constructing roads and weapons until he had amassed the force he could use to threaten the world.

فِي يَضَعُ سَيْنِ اللَّهِ الْأَمْرُ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَمِنْ بَعْدُ وَيَوْمَئِذٍ يَفْرَحُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ
بِئْضَرِ اللَّهِ يَنْصُرُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ

**In a few years' time — God is in command, first and last.
On that day, the believers will rejoice [4] At God's help. He
helps whoever He pleases: He is the Mighty, the Merciful [5]
(The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 4-5)**

The joy of the idolaters roused the believers' anger until the following part of the verse was revealed: '...yet it is they who, notwithstanding this their defeat, shall be victorious within a few years: [for] with Allah rests all power of decision, first and last...' (*ar-Rum*: 3-4), whereupon the believers rejoiced, and Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* said: 'I swear, Allah would not give joy to such people (the Arab idolaters); the Byzantines will defeat the Persians after three years pass!'

This is because the word 'a few' (*bid'*, in Arabic) literally means 'three to ten'. But why did Abu Bakr understand it to mean the minimum of this range? It is because he was As-Siddiq (one who has great faith), and he knew that the True Lord *Glorified is He* would not make the believers bear nine years of difficulties; and this is part of the great faith and trust by which Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* was characterised.

And so Abu Bakr⁽¹⁾ said to Ubayy ibn Khalaf (one of the disbelievers at that time): 'I swear, Allah will not let your joy last (i.e. your joy upon seeing the disbelievers triumph), for Allah has told us that it will end within a few years.' Ubayy replied, 'Would you like to lay a wager on such a thing?' Abu Bakr said, 'I will wager you for riding she-camels: if after three years the Byzantines triumph, I will take ten from you; if the Persians triumph, I will give you ten.'

(1) *The story of Abu Bakr's bet with Ubayy ibn Khalaf regarding the victory of the Romans*

When Abu Bakr went to Messenger Muhammad and told him of this, Messenger Muhammad said: ‘O Abu Bakr, offer him higher stakes for a longer time’ that is, offer him a wager of one hundred she-camels and increase the time from three to nine years. Indeed, Abu Bakr went to Ubayy and offered him this wager, and the later accepted the wager of one hundred she-camels.⁽¹⁾

Later, when the idolaters’ persecution against the believers became severe, and Abu Bakr went out to emigrate,⁽²⁾ Ubayy ibn Khalaf saw him and said, ‘Where are you going, Abu Fusayl?’ They used to mock Abu Bakr by calling him this, as ‘Bakr’ means a strong camel, whilst Fusayl means a small one. Abu Bakr replied, ‘I am emigrating.’ ‘What about the wager we have?’ asked Ubayy. Abu Bakr replied, ‘If you win it, my son Abd Ar-Rahman will cover the wager.’ Then, when the battle of Badr came, Abd Ar-Rahman saw Ubayy going out to fight, and said to him: ‘Where are you going?’ ‘To Badr’, he replied. ‘and what about our wager, should you be killed?’ he asked. ‘My son will give it to you’, Ubayy replied.

At Badr,⁽³⁾ Ubayy ibn Khalaf was given a mortal injury by the Messenger of Allah, and so his son gave the prize to Abd Ar-Rahman, the son of Abu-Bakr. They took it to Messenger Muhammad, and he told them to give it in charity.⁽⁴⁾

Here, there is a miraculous sign of faith that is worth noting. We talked before about the unseen and the seen worlds. We said that there are several types of the unseen things: there are those unseen things which are indicated by premises, such as a geometry exercise given to a student to solve, and the secrets of the universe which scientists discover by means of the clues in the universe, such as the discovery of the principles of the steam engine, and Archimedes’ discovery of the principles of floatation, etc. We do not say that such people knew unseen things; rather, they utilised existing data to lead them to the discovery of previously unknown things.

(1) Narrated by At-Tabari, Al-Bayhaqi and Ibn Abu Hatim, on the authority of Qatada

(2) As narrated by Ibn Hisham in his (Sira)

(3) It was actually at the battle of Uhud, not Badr. The one killed at the battle of Badr was ‘Umayya ibn Khalaf, who was killed by Bilal. (See Al-Bayhaqi’s Dala’il.)

(4) Narrated by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur

The absolute unseen things, on the other hand, have no premise or clues to indicate. Thus, the unseen world is invisible to all people. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'He [alone] knows that which is beyond the reach of a created being's perception, and to none does He disclose aught of the mysteries of His Own Knowledge, unless it be to an apostle whom He has been pleased to elect...' (*al-Jinn*: 26-27).

Another kind of the unseen things is the things that are invisible or unknown to you, but are visible or known to others. For example, if something is stolen from you, it is unseen to you because you do not know where it is, but it is not unseen for the thief.

The problem with people is that they do not use the available known data to search for the secrets of the universe, but instead they use them to seek out other people's secrets. We say to them: If you want to know other people's secrets, then allow them to know yours; I do not think anyone would agree to such a thing.

So, keeping the unseen things hidden from people is one of Allah's greatest blessings, for He *Glorified is He* is the Lord of all people, and He wants His creatures to draw benefit from one another. Do you not see that if you know something bad about someone, it may make you ignore all their good deeds, and may make you hate them, and hate all their good qualities? Therefore, Allah hides from you the secrets of others, so you can benefit from their good qualities.

Allah hides the unseen world from us either by means of the veil of the past, or the future or the veil of place. You do not know what happened in the past, before you were born, unless someone you trust tells you about it. Likewise, you do not know what will happen in the future. As for the veil of place, you do not know what exists in a place other than where you are now; something might even be in the same place as you, but it is hidden so you do not see it.

An example of this is in the verse: '...and they say to themselves, "Why does Allah not chastise us for what we are saying? ..."' (*al-Mujadala*: 8). Who told the Messenger of Allah what they said to themselves? Allah lifted the veil of place for him, and told him what was in the hearts of those people,

and then Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told them the same. Should not this have been enough for them to believe in Allah, who revealed the secrets of their hearts? Thus, their attitude was purely one of stubborn obstinacy and denial.

The same is the case regarding what happened to Messenger Muhammad at the military expedition of Mu'ta. It took place in the land of Jordan while Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was in Medina. We know that the authors of the Prophetic Biography did not use the term *ghazwa* (military expedition) except for those wars in which Messenger Muhammad was physically present. Every military warfare that took place without Messenger Muhammad's presence is termed a *sariyya* (detachment), except for Mu'ta which alone amongst these is given the name *ghazwa*. Why is this, since Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not physically present there? They said it is because Messenger Muhammad did witness the battle while he was in Medina because Allah lifted for him the veil of place and allowed him to see what was happening there. So, he could inform his companions about the events of the battle as though he was seeing them by himself. He told them that so-and-so took up the standard and was slain, and then so-and-so took it up and was also slain.' When word from the battle reached them, they found that the incidents took place exactly as Messenger Muhammad had told them.⁽¹⁾

Allah *Glorified is He* also lifted for him the veil of the past, telling him about what had happened to previous nations. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Now [as for thee, O Muhammad,] thou wert not present on the sunset slope [of Mount Sinai] when We imposed the Law upon Musa (Moses)...' (*al-Qasas*: 44), and '...And neither didst thou dwell among the people of Midyan, conveying Our messages unto them...' (*al-Qasas*: 45).

He also revealed the veil of the future for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* as is revealed in the verse we are currently examining: '...yet it is they who, notwithstanding this their defeat, shall be victorious within a few years...' (*ar-Rum*: 3-4). Is there a computer which can tell us the result of a battle that will take place three to nine years in the future?

(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him

Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* the Unlettered Prophet who lived in the Arabian Peninsula, knowing nothing of the forces of Persia and Byzantium, told us what the result of their conflict would be because He, Who Knows how things are and how they will be, told him. The fact that Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* announced this, and challenged the world with it in the Quran that would be recited, until the Day of Resurrection, is enough to prove he truly was speaking for Allah, and that he was completely convinced that things would play out as Allah said they would.

Because of this absolute trust, Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* was named As-Siddiq, when someone told him what Messenger Muhammad had said about the Miraculous Night Journey he had made, he simply replied, 'If he (Muhammad) said it, then, he spoke the truth.'⁽¹⁾ So the Messenger of Allah announced the result of the then-coming war, and made a wager (it was not prohibited then) with the idolaters on it, and adhered to it; and this was only because he was convinced of this revelation, and convinced that it could never be wrong.

Allah's words: 'with Allah rests all power of decision, first and last' (*ar-Rum*: 4) means: 'Do not imagine that the Persians' victory over the Byzantines, or the Byzantines' victory over the Persians is beyond the will of Allah; Allah has all power of decision before the victory, and He still has it after the victory'.

So, when the Byzantines triumphed, Allah has been in control, and when the Persians triumphed, Allah has been in control. The True Lord *Glorified is He* awakens the righteous people by allowing the bad ones to gain victories; this way excites the former's passions and deepens their feelings towards their enemies, alerting them that it is not fitting that their enemies be in a better position than they are.

So, the victory given to those whom Allah dislikes over those whom Allah likes is timed by Allah. Then, do not be sad if you find you have an enemy; only a fool does. A wise man sees that his enemy is in his favour because an enemy reminds him that he should always be strong and prepared,

(1) Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi and Hakim on the authority of `Aisha Allah be pleased with her

and reminds him to be always upright so that his enemy cannot exploit his weaknesses. The enemy makes you use all your faculties in the way of goodness so that you can be better than him; and so the poet said:

My enemies are a blessing and a kindness for me:

I ought to thank them for all their help;

They are like a cure that comes with a bitter pill,

So, may Allah always keep my enemies near!

They seek out my flaws, so I work to avoid them;

They compete with me, and spur me to win.

Thus, Allah has all power of decision, first and last, and He has His own wise reasons for allowing falsehood to gain victories. Consider the Battle of Uhud, and how the Muslims were defeated when they disobeyed the command of Messenger Muhammad and left their positions in search of battle-spoils. They were defeated even though Messenger Muhammad was amongst them because the rule of Allah necessitated that they be defeated when they disobeyed the command of His Messenger. What would have happened if the Muslims had won despite disobeying their Messenger? If they had triumphed, the command of the Messenger would have lost its value and esteem, and they would never have obeyed him again after that.

And on the day of the Battle of Hunayn: ‘...and [He did so, too,] on the Day of Hunayn, when you took pride in your great numbers...’ (*at-Tawba*: 25).

Even Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* himself said, ‘We shall not be defeated today through lack of numbers!’⁽¹⁾ When they looked to their own strength and forgot about Allah’s aid, they began to be defeated; then Allah took pity on them, and showed them His Mercy, and gave them victory in the end.

So, all power of decision rests with Allah, first and last. Therefore, you should not imagine that the victory of falsehood was contrary to Allah’s will, or out of His control; rather, Allah willed it, and made it happen for a wise reason.

(1) Narrated by *Al-Bayhaqi* on the authority of *Ar-Rabi` ibn Anas*

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘...And on that day, will the believers [too, have cause to] rejoice in Allah’s succour’ (*ar-Rum*: 4). What succour was it that would make the believers rejoice? Would they rejoice in the victory of the Byzantines over the Persians? The scholars say that their joy was caused by a series of interrelated events. First, they would rejoice in the victory of people who followed a divinely-revealed religion, People of the Book over people who were disbelievers and atheists; and they would rejoice because the prophecy of Messenger Muhammad had proved true; and they would rejoice because they believed in Messenger Muhammad, and they knew him to be truthful even before he made this prophecy.

They rejoiced because they had made the right choice, and every time a sign or a verse was revealed they all rejoiced in themselves because they were right to believe in the One God Who knows how everything will come to pass, and they followed His Messenger *peace and blessing be upon him*. So, their joy was not for only one thing, but rather was for several interrelated things.

Moreover, the day the Byzantines defeated the Persians coincided with the day the Muslims were victorious at the Battle of Badr.⁽¹⁾

‘He gives succour to whomever He wills’ (*ar-Rum*: 5), whether Byzantine or Persian, since all power of decision rests with Him alone at all times, ‘...since He Alone is Almighty, a Dispenser of Mercy’ (*ar-Rum*: 5). The True Lord *Glorified is He* describes himself here with two attributes: The Almighty and the Dispenser of Mercy. Although ‘Almighty’ means that He cannot be defeated or overcome, highlighting His Overwhelming Power, He follows it with the attribute of Mercy in order that this balance of Might and Mercy be reflected in the heart of the believer.

Also, mentioning the attribute of might here reminds us that nothing can happen without Allah’s leave. Thus, when one party wins and another loses even if it were falsehood that wins, this only happens according to His will. Allah only allows falsehood and disbelief to exist in order to reveal the truth. When people are harmed by falsehood, and made wretched by disbelief, they will seek refuge in faith, and cling fast to it.

(1) Narrated by At-Tirmidhi on the authority of Abu Sa`id Al-Khudri

Read Allah's word, '...and brought utterly low the cause of those who were bent on denying the truth, whereas Allah's cause remained supreme...' (*at-Tawba*: 40). He did not say, 'And He made Allah's cause supreme' because He did not need to make it so, since to make something change means to take it from one state to another, whilst Allah's Cause has always been and always will be supreme, even if the cause of falsehood surfaces from time to time.

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

وَعَدَ اللَّهُ لَا يَخْلِفُ اللَّهُ وَعْدَهُ، وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٦﴾

**This is God's promise: God never breaks
His promise, but most people do not
know [6] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 6)**

A 'promise' *wa'd* means to inform someone of something good that will happen to them. 'Never does Allah fail to fulfil His promise' (*ar-Rum*: 6). There is a difference between Allah's promise and man's promise because you might promise someone something good but then fail to deliver because of circumstances such as changing your mind, or not being able to do what you promised or because the reason for promise changes.

So, you do not possess the means to guarantee that you will fulfil your promise. The promise of the True Lord *Glorified is He* on the other hand, is a promise that will surely be realised because there is no power that can prevent Him from keeping His promise, and there is nothing on the earth or in the heavens that can hold Him *Glorified is He* back. If Allah promises something, be sure He will deliver.

Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* teaches us: 'and never say about anything, "Behold, I shall do this tomorrow," without [adding], "if Allah so wills."' (*al-Kahf*: 23-24)

This means that you should give yourself a way out of inadvertently lying, should things turn out and you cannot fulfil your promise. Place your affairs under your Lord's control, not yours, because you have no power at all to guarantee anything.

So, remind yourself, and say, 'If Allah wills' so that if circumstances prevent you from fulfilling your promise you can say, 'I willed it, but Allah did not'.

Allah *Glorified is He* never breaks His promises because He knows how everything will happen, and there is no power that can prevent Him from implementing His will, and He has no associate who can contradict Him, or act against His will.

If you like, read Allah's words: 'Doomed are the hands of him of the glowing countenance, and doomed is he! What will his wealth avail him, and all that he has gained? [In the life to come] he shall have to endure a fire fiercely glowing; together with his wife, that carrier of evil tales, [who bears] around her neck a rope of twisted strands!' (*al-Masad*: 1-5) Was not Abu Lahab able, at that time, to embrace Islam, just as Hamza, Khalid `Ikrima Allah be pleased with them and others did? Did he not have free will, just as they did? Did he not hear this chapter? On the contrary, he kept to disbelief, and never spoke the words of faith. Even, he never tried to vex Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by falsely pretending to turn to Islam, saying to Quraysh: 'Muhammad said I would not believe in Allah and his message, even though I testify that there is no Allah but Allah, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; does not this show his foolishness'?

So, as long as the Quran predicts something, it will surely come to pass just as predicted. We notice that the word 'promise' here means glad tidings taking place in the future. The discourse concerns two groups, one that will be victorious and rejoice in victory and the other that will be defeated and mourn defeat. How could this be a promise of glad tidings then, since the believer's joy is the disbeliever's sorrow?

To explain this, let us remember that the orientalist argued Allah's word in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*: 'He has created man out of sounding clay, like pottery, whereas the jinn He has created out of a confusing flame of fire. Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow?' (*ar-Rahman*: 14-16) They said that this makes sense, and is a clear example of Allah's blessings; but what about: 'A flash of fire will be let loose upon you, and smoke, and you will be left without succour! Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can

you disavow?’ (*ar-Rahman*: 35-36) What blessing is there in the flames of fire and smoke?

These people have forgotten that it is a blessing to be warned about danger before it befalls you; Allah warns us about the result of disbelief so that we can avoid it. It is like a father saying to his son: ‘If you neglect your studies, you will fail, and I will do such-and-such to you’.

So, mentioning Hell and torment is a blessing for all those who go against Allah’s guidance; when they hear this warning, they may repent and refrain from disbelief.

Allah’s words: ‘...but most people know [it] not’ (*ar-Rum*: 6), deny that they have knowledge of the inner reality of things.

Then, Allah says of them:

يَعْلَمُونَ ظَاهِرًا مِّنَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ عَنِ الْآخِرَةِ هُمْ غَفْلُونَ ﴿٧﴾

They only know the outer surface of this present life and are heedless of the life to come [7] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 7)

If there is a verb that is negated at first occurrence and affirmed in the other occurrence, this means that there are some aspects of difference. They do not know the inner reality of things, but only know their outer surface; and they do not even know the outer surface of all things; they know only the outer surface of the things of this worldly life, knowing nothing of their inner reality; so what about the hereafter?

If we reflect on the affairs of this world, we find that the positive laws adopted at some time are argued and abandoned later. It is as if we know nothing of this world except its outer surface. For example, here in Egypt we have been implementing the agricultural reform law since 1952, we used to be very eager to follow it, we took it very seriously, and we would not accept it to be tampered with in the way they are discussing today. They now want to reconsider it, or even cancel it altogether because it is no longer applicable in these times. Likewise, Russia, which built the communist system and defended it with all its might, is the one that has now gone against this system, and brought it down.

It was not America that brought it down, for example, and if it had done so, the power and haughtiness of communism would have been transferred to it. Thus, it is said that communism was not destroyed, but rather, it committed suicide by means of its followers; it is possible that these people commit suicide just as their system did. Therefore, it would be better for them to be upright for Allah's sake, and be honest with the people.

So, we only know the outer surface of this worldly life, not its reality. These days, we are suffering because of the pesticides that we once thought would make things easier for us, and save us the time and effort needed to control pests manually.

The world is also suffering because of the use of cars, and the pollution and death caused by them every day. Compare the means of transport in the past to those of today. Although today's means of transport have an immediate benefit, they ultimately cause much harm. It is enough to observe that the waste of the natural creatures created by Allah bring benefit to the earth, whilst the waste of the human-made products spoil the earth. Why is this? It is because we only understand the outer surface of things. If the one who discovered diesel fuel, for example, had known the reality of it, he would not have used it for the things we use it for today.

This is regarding our knowledge of this worldly life; as for the hereafter, we are ignorant of it. Therefore, Al-Hasan *Allah be pleased with him* said: 'I am amazed by the man who holds a coin in his fingertips and thereby deduces its weight, and taps it and thereby knows if it is forged or not, yet he does not pray properly.'⁽¹⁾

An example of this is Allah's word: '...and it was not thou who cast [terror into them, O Prophet], when thou didst cast it, but it was Allah who cast...' (*al-Anfal*: 17). Allah *Glorified is He* negated and then affirmed the action of casting in the same verse. This is because the perspectives are different; the affirmation targets one thing, whereas the negation targets another. It was previously illustrated that the student who is compelled to study, opens the book, turns the pages, and pretends to read. On testing him, he was found that

(1) Narrated by Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abu Hatim, and Ibn Mardawayhi

he has not understood anything. He performed the action of studying, but in reality he did not study at all because he could not retain anything.

Likewise, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* flung a handful of pebbles at the army of the disbelievers; however, as Allah says: ‘... It was not your throw [that defeated them] but Allah’s...’ (*al-Anfal*: 17). The Prophet’s human power could not possibly cause this single throw to defeat the whole army; rather, it was the power of Allah that did it.

When Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘... But most people do not know’ (*ar-Rum*: 6), He excludes the minority of people from this lack of knowledge. Even though the worldly laws and systems are changed for the sake of all people, yet there is a minority who opposes and refuses to acknowledge them. Thus, not everyone is guilty of this lack of knowledge.

It is deceptively apparent to many people that this worldly life comprises much enjoyment and satiation of passions, forgetting the punishment in the Hereafter for giving themselves absolute freedom in this life. The people in the countryside say about those who do not consider the consequences of things: ‘The wolf ate a scythe’, while another one say: ‘When it comes out the other end, we will hear his howl’!

As Allah says, ‘The love of desirable things is made alluring for men— women, children, gold and silver treasures piled up high, horses with fine markings, livestock, and farmland— these may be the joys of this life, but Allah has the best place to return to’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 14). People remember the enjoyment of this worldly life and forget the everlasting bliss of the hereafter; however, the wise person is the one who can make a balance between the two. As previously mentioned, the lifetime of this world as far as the person is concerned is only as long as he remains within it. It is his life span alone which is concerned, rather than the whole lifetime of the entire world. The man’s life in it is limited and certainly ended in death.

However, the hereafter is an enduring and endless world of everlasting sheer bliss. So, the wise person should not let the limited worldly pleasure distract him from the endless absolute one or to accept such a bad deal.

When someone asked ‘*Ali Allah be pleased with him*’ ‘I want to know whether I am one of the followers of this world, or among the devotees of the hereafter,’

he replied: 'Allah does not grant me the answer; you have the answer yourself. When two people come to you, one with a gift and the other with a request, if you are delighted by the one with the gift, you are a devotee of this world, whereas if you are delighted by the one with the request, you are a person of the next world.'

This refers to the fact that the person loves people who provide him with the means to the desired life; if he desires the hereafter, he will surely love those who preserve it for him, whereas, if he desires this world, he will surely love those who preserve it for him. Some time ago, whenever a pious man received a beggar, he used to smile in his face, greet him as a friend and say, 'Welcome to the one who would carry my provisions to the Hereafter for free!'

In Allah's saying: '... And are heedless of the life to come' (*ar-Rum: 7*), the Arabic words have an additional repeated pronoun which stresses their being aware of recklessness. The extra pronoun here means that their heedlessness is of their own making; for they have plain evidence that they are warned, but evidence does nothing for people who choose to be reckless.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says:

أَوَلَمْ يَتَفَكَّرُوا فِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ
وَأَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى وَإِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ النَّاسِ بِلِقَائِ رَبِّهِمْ لَكَافِرُونَ ﴿٨﴾

Have they not thought about their own selves? God did not create the heavens and earth and everything between them without a serious purpose and an appointed time, yet many people deny that they will meet their Lord [8]
(The Quran, *ar-Rum: 8*)

This means that they know nothing but the superficial aspect of this worldly life; they are heedless of the hereafter and they do not reflect on their own selves; however, evidence (of Allah) comes to them sometimes within themselves, and other times within the heavens and the earth.

As for the evidence in themselves, Allah advises people to make their own selves the subject of their contemplation and reflect upon the inner secrets

proving the omnipotence of Allah, the Creator. Despite all advances of science, there are other secrets within the human being that are not discovered yet.

By considering the essential elements for human's survival; food, water and air, it is noticed that man can go without food for up to a month subsisting on the stored energy and he can go without water for three to ten days depending on the amount of the stored water within his body, but he cannot go without air for more than a few breaths. Thus, Allah is All-Wise that He secured these essential elements to mankind. Allah *the Almighty* makes man able to go without food for a certain period because others might hoard and keep food from him so he is forced to seek it out. However, man's capacity to go without water is less, so Allah *the Exalted* has made the hoarding of water less common.

As for air, the person cannot go without except for a few breaths. Allah's Wisdom made it impossible that anyone could ever take possession of it; otherwise, people would hoard air whenever they could as punishment, and others might die before they are excused.

In the digestive system, there are two adjacent pipes, the trachea for air and the oesophagus where food passes down to get to the stomach. On swallowing food, if a single grain of rice goes down the wrong pipe; gets stuck in the trachea, the person chokes, and keeps on resisting it until it is expelled. The involuntarily uncontrollable action of the epiglottis is achieved when it closes the trachea during swallowing.

It is also perceptible that there is a ring of muscle at the opening of the stomach, known as a sphincter, which closes the stomach after food enters it so that stomach acidic contents will be prevented from returning upwards into the oesophagus. Otherwise, sphincter disorders can cause bad breath, technically called halitosis.

Moreover, the way that food wastes are naturally and comfortably expelled from the body is observable. After getting rid of food wastes, man feels relieved; likewise, in the case of the excess of liquids that surpassed the amount held in the bowels and the bladder, he needs to expel them.

The more science advances and studies undertaken, the more Allah's blessings are. There are still more signs to be discovered remained within

the human body, as per Allah's saying: 'And in yourselves too, do you not see?' (*adh-Dhariyat*: 21)

Allah calls people to explore their own selves before studying the surrounding signs in the heavens and the earth; for their capabilities might fall short of seeing all far-fetched signs, but their own selves are the closest and strongest evidence they can witness.

As Allah says, 'Have they not thought about their own selves?...' (*ar-Rum*: 8) He asks people to reflect on their own selves, paying no attention to the arguments and debates of the people. On debating with people, the person exhibits obstinacy and a desire to win even by use of falsehood. On the contrary, when man thinks alone and reflects on himself without any obstinacy, intervention, timidity of being defeated in a discussion or desiring for acquiring status, then, he is able to reach the truth.

Hence, The Quran tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Say [Prophet], "I advise you to do one thing only..."' (*Saba*': 46). Those sceptics, who are wondering about the veracity of the Messenger, accusing him of lies, fabrications and sorcery, were asked to do one thing: 'Stand before Allah, in pairs or singly'. They were asked to bear witness, whether in pairs or alone, each one by himself, as Allah says, 'And think: there is no sign of madness in your companion [the Prophet]— he is only warning you before severe suffering arrives' (*Saba*': 46).

Thus, the quest for the truth is not established by means of public debate, but rather by the person's sole reflection on the matter, or his contemplation with a peer. However, in public discussions, the soul is stirred with the desire for success and victory; so the wise person advises the debating party to 'think the matter over by himself' to be unaffectedly closer to objectivity and to the truth.

After Allah commands people to contemplate within themselves, He, then, directs them to reflect on the surrounding signs in the heavens and the earth: '... Allah did not create the heavens and earth and everything between them without a serious purpose and an appointed time...' (*ar-Rum*: 8). However, there is another verse that encourages people to reflect first on the heavens

and the earth before their own selves: ‘The creation of the heavens and earth is greater by far than the creation of mankind...’ (*Ghafir*: 57).

The person might die before he is born, after several years or even after a hundred; however, all signs in the heavens and the earth remain unchangingly as first created and still fulfil their roles unmistakably without requiring any maintenance or vacation. Indeed, they are greater and more magnificent than the creation of mankind.

Consequently, there are signs within human’s bodies and others in the heavens and the earth; but which of them are greater? It is said that since the heavens and the earth are greater than the creation of mankind, their signs must be stronger. If the person is not convinced by them, then he can switch to reflect on the signs in his own self. The scholars who study the two points of views of the negotiation (strong and weak) assume that they depend upon the Benefactor and the beneficial. When Allah, the Benefactor gives a parable, He uses the greater one; if the person cannot understand it, He *the Exalted* gives me a lesser one, whereas, the beneficial is the human being who moves from the lesser signs to the greater ones.

Allah *Glorified is He* by: ‘... And everything between them’ refers to the planets and stars in the sky. In the past, many great scholars, to simplify religious facts to the people, alleged that the seven planets denoted the seven heavens. However, the reality is that these seven planets are all within the Nearest Heaven of this world, as Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘... We have made the nearest one beautifully illuminated and secure...’ (*Fussilat*: 12).

What a small part of the sky that embraces the seen celestial bodies! Do you know how many seconds it takes light to reach you from the sun or from the moon? The sun is eight light minutes far from the earth, whereas the Andromeda Galaxy is approximately two-and-half-million light years.

To determine this enormous distance, multiply one million years by 365 days, then by 24 hours, then by 60 minutes, then by 60 seconds and finally by 300,000 kilometres.

People only stopped alleging that the seven planets [of the ancient Ptolemaic geocentric system] denoted the seven heavens, as scientists discovered one

more planet orbiting the sun, followed by another one discovered after a few more years. Moreover, when man landed on the moon, the sophists quickly assumed, 'The Quran previously predicted this, as Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Jinn and mankind, if you can pass beyond the regions of heaven and earth, then do so: you will not pass without Our authority' (*ar-Rahman*: 33).

They alleged that the 'authority' refers to that of the science which has allowed them to reach the surface of the moon. This is an eccentric allegation uttered by such great scholars, for the moon does not denote the sky; it is merely a part of it, such as 'New Cairo' that is a suburb of Cairo! Furthermore, if 'authority' here means the authority of science, then this makes no sense in relation to the directly following verse: 'A flash of fire and smoke will be released upon you and no one will come to your aid' (*ar-Rahman*: 35).

The reason for this nonsense is the mixing of religious science with a secular one. The problem comes from religious scholars trying to comment on things they do not know. The secular science is meant to prove to the people the Greatness and the Might of Allah, the Creator; rather than deriving legitimate rulings.

Those people denied the theory that the earth is spherical and that it orbits the sun, and supposed that the scientists, though disbelievers, had somehow obtained knowledge of the unseen by developing ways to measure the earth's movement and to predict solar and lunar eclipses with complete accuracy.

As previously mentioned, such things are not truly from the absolute unseen realm; but rather, they are examples of the unobserved matters for which Allah has given us clues to discover them. Scientists came to this knowledge by researching and studying physical phenomena; this is highlighted in Allah's saying, '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).

This is also one of the verses where the signs of the heavens and the earth are aforementioned prior to the proofs within the human being. Accordingly, science is based on facts and studies, rather than on religion. Religion came to show people their obligations and prohibitions and left science to those who are able to understand it.

Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Without a serious purpose’ because the heavens, the earth, and the celestial bodies in between all move in a fixed and unchanging orderly system. The movement of the celestial bodies follows a precise order in perfect harmony.

The sun never declines to rise upon certain people because it follows a firm and fixed subjecting law. As long as these signs were perfectly and steadily created, they can be used to determine man’s calculations and to adjust his time according to them, such as a clock which would adjust the time only if it was properly ordered in itself.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘The sun and the moon follow their calculated courses’ (*ar-Rahman*: 5). This means that they are created with precision because He *the Exalted* has created them according to a precise calculation in order that they could be used as tools for calculation, as He says, ‘We have determined phases for the moon until finally it becomes like an old date-stalk. The sun cannot overtake the moon, nor can the night outrun the day: each floats in [its own] orbit.’ (*Ya Sin*: 39-40)

Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘... Determining phases for it so that you might know the number of years and how to calculate time...’ (*Yunus*: 5). Of course, the moon could not be used to count years and measure time except it has been created according to a precise calculation.

Despite the fact that Allah has created the universe in a stable form for a serious purpose, yet this stable role will not function the same forever; for Allah has created it in this stable form to last for a set amount of time, as Allah says, ‘... Allah did not create the heavens and earth and everything between them without a serious purpose and an appointed time...’ (*ar-Rum*: 8). Once the appointed time runs out, the sun will be shrouded in darkness, the stars will be dimmed and the earth and the heavens will be changed beyond recognition. Thus, these once-stable signs will not only discontinue the same functions, but will also be utterly wiped from existence.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘... Yet many people deny that they will meet their Lord’ (*ar-Rum*: 8). In recurrent debates with the communists, they were opposed that they have severely punished and tortured their capitalist

and feudalist opponents; they replied that those opponents deserved this because they had oppressed, and corrupted society! Hence, their thesis that there is no reckoning after death is refuted; though they have revenged themselves, but what about those who preceded their time and died without ever getting the punishment they deserved? Would it not be just for the communists to acknowledge the existence of the Day of Reckoning where people will be gathered together and punished for what they previously did?

This is a proof on the inevitability of the Resurrection; if someone does not get his deserved punishment in this world, he will be penalised in the hereafter. Thereby, the principle of reward and punishment is established in everything because if the person does whatever he wishes in this world and spreads corruption on earth without being punished, he will thus unfairly be the winner if there is no other world where he is reprimanded.

Hence, the belief in both the hereafter and the meeting with Allah is a logical inevitability, yet many people deny this: ‘... Yet many people deny that they will meet their Lord’ (*ar-Rum*: 8).

Thus, the believer should be sure of the certainty of this meeting because the worldly laws only combat apparent evil, whereas the hidden one is only known and punished by Allah, so there should be another day to punish the unknown evildoers.

أَوَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَيَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ كَانُوا أَشَدَّ
مِنْهُمْ قُوَّةً وَأَثَارُوا الْأَرْضَ وَعَمَرُوهَا أَكْثَرَ مِمَّا عَمَرُوهَا وَجَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُهُمْ
بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَمَا كَانُوا لِيُظْلَمَهُمْ وَلَكِنْ كَانُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿٩﴾

Have they not travelled through the land and seen how their predecessors met their end? They were mightier than them: they cultivated the earth more and built more upon it. Their own messengers also came to them with clear signs: God did not wrong them; they wronged themselves [9] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 9)

This verse asks how the disbelievers deny meeting Allah, while they have travelled and seen contemplatively what happened to those deniers of

previous nations. They have not taken heed of what happened in this world, in addition to what will happen in the Hereafter.

As the punishment afflicted the deniers in this world is witnessed and believed by other nations, it is also a must to believe what Allah tells about the hereafter. If someone wants to find out an unknown matter, he should utilise what he knows to disclose it. So, people should travel, reflect on what happened to those who denied the truth and pay attention to what Allah did to them.

To ‘travel’ means to go from one place to another: ‘Have they not travelled through the land ...’ (*ar-Rum*: 9)? The preposition used is ‘through’, which literally means ‘in’, but do we travel in the earth, or on it? This is an example of the precise rhetorical style and miraculous nature of the Quran. Travelling seems to be on the earth, but in reality it is in it, as Allah says: ‘... Travel safely in this land by night or by day’ (*Saba*: 18). The earth is not merely the terrestrial surface including the dry land and the aquatic areas, upon which people dwell, but rather, it also includes the atmosphere that surrounds it. Hence, the atmosphere is part of the earth because it is essential for the existence of life on it; thus, travelling in reality is not on earth but through it.

Islam considers travelling in the earth in two ways; tourism for reflection and other for trade. The former allows the person to reflect upon the signs in the earth as he passes by them. For example, the Arabian Peninsula is a mountainous desert where vegetation is rare, on the contrary to Spain the green meadows of which spread everywhere so that it the land is hardly seen from greeneries.

However, both places embrace a different kind of bliss because Allah, the Creator distributes good things over the universe. Though the inhabitants of this dry and arid land could barely live, yet they were patient so Allah granted them blessing from beneath the earth, and they became able to supply the greatest and most advanced powers on earth with indispensable fuel. When the Arabs cut fuel off in 1973, they panicked, and were about to die from cold.

When a person travels and reflects upon the signs of earth, he finds that it is like a watermelon; if you cut it into pieces lengthwise, each piece will be equal to the other. Similarly, Allah equally endows various places on earth

with all kinds of goodness so that the total of good things in any place in the earth will be equal to that of another.

The ignored and so-called lifeless mountains are now stores of wealth and goodness so that all people have turned to live nearby and get benefit from them. For example, the urban rebirth that is taking place in Sinai is highly noticeable.

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* distributes goodness equally over the world's countries, such as He endows people with different talents so that they would remain connected by common needs to each other and that they would not feel dispensable for one another. This highlights a significant point of faith that all mankind are Allah's servants and creatures and all lands are His property; and that Allah has no son or a family relationship with any of His creatures, so they are all equal. As previously said; people should not be resentful or jealous of a wealthy person because the blessings he has been given will definitely benefit you in the end.

Allah's saying: 'Their predecessors' (*ar-Rum*: 9) refers to the nations who denied their Messengers. In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* states the consequences suffered by these deniers: '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; they wronged themselves.' (*al-'Ankabut*: 40) Allah *Glorified is He* says to the disbelievers of Quraysh: 'You [people] pass by their ruins morning and night: will you not take heed?' (*as-Saffat*: 137-138)

Thus, when a person travels to engage in a trade, he sees the dwellings of Saleh and the other townships that were destroyed but left traces that can still be witnessed by any person. Allah *the Exalted* says, 'Have you [Prophet] considered how your Lord dealt with [the people] of 'Ad, of Iram [the city] of lofty pillars, whose like has never been made in any land?' (*al-Fajr*: 6-8) Allah tells that they dwelt amongst sand dunes, 'and Thamud, who hewed into the rocks in the valley, and the mighty and powerful Pharaoh? All of them committed excesses in their lands, and spread corruption there: your Lord let a scourge of punishment loose on them.' (*al-Fajr*: 9-13)

All those people possessed civilizations which still amaze the most advanced present peoples who visit their traces and seek out their secrets and wonders. However, those previous civilizations could not protect themselves from destruction, or fend off Allah's torment once it came to them; accordingly, this is a lesson to be learned from them.

Allah *the Exalted* says, 'Have they not travelled through the land and seen how their predecessors met their end?... ' (*ar-Rum*: 9) as if He tells the disbelievers of Quraysh that they are the humblest among other nations; they have no power, no wealth, no civilisation and no architectural constructions. Thus, it is easy for Allah to simply punish them as He previously did with those who were more powerful, but for their being secured by Allah's promise: 'But Allah would not send them punishment while you [Prophet] are in their midst, nor would He punish them if they sought forgiveness' (*al-Anfal*: 33).

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says, '...They were mightier than them: they cultivated the earth more and built more upon it...' (*ar-Rum*: 9). The previously truth-denying nations who were illustratively punished by Allah were stronger, their lands were more fertile and they left a strong impact on the earth so that they farmed and built upon it, whereas the disbelievers of Quraysh dwell in a barren valley devoid of crops. The word 'farming' or 'ploughing' can be used in Arabic to mean 'crops', as in Allah's words: 'Destroying crops and livestock' (*al-Baqara*: 205).

It is noticed that land does not produce good crops unless it is farmed and turned over so that air can permeate the soil and help it to fulfil its purpose in the best way. If the plot is simply left as it is, without ploughing the compact soil, it will prevent the fragile shoots from pushing through the earth, especially in the first stages of germination.

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says of plants: 'Consider the seeds you sow in the ground, is it you who make them grow or Us?' (*al-Waqi'a*: 63-64) In the story of the cow and the Israelites, when they were reluctant to slaughter it and asked for further details about it, Allah *Glorified is He* says to them: '... He replied, "It is a perfect and unblemished cow, not trained to till the earth or water the fields" ...' (*al-Baqara*: 71).

It is a free-range cow that is difficult to be led, not used for ploughing, tilling, or irrigating the land. The perfect farmer should till and turn the soil before sowing it, and then leave it for a while so that air and sunlight can infuse it. This revitalises and renews the soil, as they say: 'Before you sow what you need, you should get rid of what you do not need'. So, these peoples had farms and crops, which they enjoyed and gained much good things.

Afterwards, Allah says, 'And (they) built more upon it'; i.e. they built upon it with the capabilities and talents granted by Allah and gained from the earth its goodness, as Allah *the Exalted* says, '... He is Who brought you into being from the earth and made you inhabit it...' (*Hud*: 61).

Thus, 'building up the earth' can take the form of any manifestation of development and life; whether farming and cultivation, construction, digging rivers and canals, building roads or any other sign that brings benefit to people. There is a distinction between farming and cultivation; the former means to sow something and then reap it all at once, such as wheat, whereas, cultivation means to plant something which then continues to provide people with produce for a long time; its yield being constantly renewed such as the fruit orchards. Farming is achieved by planting seeds, whilst cultivation is a matter of tending to plants that have already been planted beforehand.

Allah *the Exalted* then says, '...Their own messengers also came to them with clear signs...' (*ar-Rum*: 9). After Allah has given people the constituents of life and material means and after they reaped the fruits of this, He did not leave them to the material life alone, but also, He has given them the means to ethics and religion. Thus, Allah sent them the messengers 'with clear signs'; i.e. with clear proofs indicating the veracity of these messengers and their revealed messages which are so-called 'miracles'.

As previously mentioned, the Arabic word *ayat* has three meanings; it either refers to the signs of the universe showing the Omnipotent Power of Allah such as the sun and the moon; the miracles proving that the messengers are truly sent by Allah or the verses of the Quran revealing Allah's ordinance and guidance. All these matters are clear and evident.

Allah then says, '...Allah did not wrong them; they wronged themselves' (*ar-Rum*: 9). Indeed, Allah did not wrong them because He firstly gave them

all constituents of life and the material needs and then gave them the constituents of the spiritual life and the moral needs. Afterwards, if they still strayed from Allah's guidance, they only wronged themselves.

Furthermore, Allah does not undeniably wrong anyone. A person may wrong another person because he resents him and wants to gain what he has. The oppressor usurps the rights of the oppressed who has no power to protect them; so how could we imagine that Allah *Glorified is He* might wrong anyone, while He owns everything and has no need of anything? Hence, Allah *the Almighty* did not wrong them, but they wronged themselves as they deviated from His path and guidance.

ثُمَّ كَانَ عِقَابَ الَّذِينَ اسْتَوُوا السُّوءَىٰ أَنْ كَذَّبُوا
بِعَايَةِ اللَّهِ وَكَانُوا بِهَا يَسْتَهْزِءُونَ

**Later the evildoers met a terrible end for rejecting
and [repeatedly] mocking God's revelations [10]
(The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 10)**

Evildoing is the opposite of benevolence. As aforementioned, benevolence is to leave good things as they are, or make them better. For example, if there is a well from which people drink; a person might block it or pollute its water, whereas another might build a water catchment around it or install equipment to extract the water easily. The latter is benevolent while the former is an evildoer, because if the person cannot do good, he should at least refrain from doing evil and leave things as they are.

If people left the universe created by Allah *the Almighty* intact in a good state, it would remain good as is. Corruption only arises as a result of human interference, so Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'When it is said to them, "Do not cause corruption in the land", they say, "We are only putting things right", but really they are causing corruption, though they do not realise it.' (*al-Baqara*: 11-12)

Thus, human beings should get benefit from those good phenomena of the universe. For example, when I travelled to Mecca with a company in 1950, and as they were thirsty, they waited for the man who brings water for payment. They put the water in a large container and whenever they made ablutions,

each of them only used a single jug of water from the container for ablutions because they had to pay for the water. However, nowadays, people are not even sufficed by a whole bucket of water, making their ablutions from a running tap. Using water rationally is also a matter of health, and of preventing the leftover water from damaging buildings and agricultural land. Hence, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* warned people against wasting water, even if they are beside a running river.⁽¹⁾

Accordingly, the meaning of 'the evildoers' is those who corrupted something good, or created a new means to corruption. Logically, their end will be the same as their deed, as Allah says, 'Later the evildoers met a terrible end...' (*ar-Rum*: 10).

Afterwards, Allah *the Exalted* says, '...For rejecting and [repeatedly] mocking Allah's revelations' (*ar-Rum*: 10). Thus, the matter is not limited to denying the revelations, but extended to derision as well. The deviant person has a strange attitude when he mocks other virtuous people; this resembles the failing student who often mocks the hard-working one.

The great hope of the failing person is that the hard worker comes to a standstill, as well as the hope of the wrongdoer is to turn the virtuous to be deviant like him. This is the cause to their making sarcastic remarks to others, as the Quran says, 'The wicked used to laugh at the believers; they would wink at one another when the believers passed by them, joke about them when they got back to their own people, and say, when they saw them, "These people are misguided."' (*al-Mutaffifin*: 29-32)

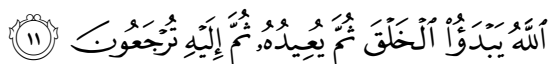
However, the wicked should not be hasty and should wait for the final reward of the believers who will have their places in paradise, and sit on their couches and thrones, as Allah says, 'So today the believers are laughing at the disbelievers as they sit on couches, gazing around. Have the disbelievers [not] been repaid for their deeds?' (*al-Mutaffifin*: 34-36)

This question mentioned in the verse is a rhetorical one addressed to the believers who bore the scorn and derision in this world, asking them whether Allah's punishment fits the crime done by the disbelievers to them.

(1) Narrated by Ahmad and Ibn Majah on the authority of `Amr ibn Al-`As

So, the philosophy of derision refers to the fact that the wicked people are unable to urge themselves to be virtuous, teased by virtuous people and hurt to see them blessed with the magnificence of good conduct and obedience, whereas they are bogged down in sin. Hence, they mock virtuous people, hoping that they will abandon their virtue and obedience.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says:



**God brings creation into being; in the end He will
reproduce it and it is to Him you will be recalled [11]
(The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 11)**

Although Allah *Glorified is He* has finished the creation in its primary state first, He still brings creation into being and He remains its Creator. As long as Allah created it in the first instance, He is also Who will bring in forth anew: ‘Allah brings creation into being; in the end, He will reproduce it...’ (*ar-Rum*: 11).

As for human understanding, it is clear that remaking something is easier than creating it for the first time because the first time, it is made from nothing, whereas, remaking things is done from something that already exists, as Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘He is the One who originates creation and will do it again— this is even easier for Him...’ (*ar-Rum*: 27). Allah explains that originating creation is easier according to human’s standards and understanding, whereas, in reality, the concept of easy and easier is not applicable to Allah because He *the Almighty* does not exert effort to create things, but rather, he only says ‘Be!’ and it is. He *the Exalted* speaks to humans according to the level of their understanding.

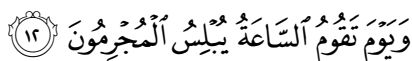
Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* originates and recreates, such as crops which are harvested and their seeds will be replanted in the next year. Hence, crops are in a regular cycle of creation and renewal.

As previously illustrated, the implanted flower is fresh, sweet-scented, and brilliantly coloured. However, when it is cut, it dries up because its stored water evaporates, its colour and fragrance disperse into the air and then its remnant disintegrates into dust. Recurrently, when a new flower is planted, it takes the water, colour, and fragrance from the surrounding environment.

In this way, a life cycle begins and another ends because the means for sustaining daily life that Allah has originated in the beginning are the same that exist today, without any change. The amount of water found nowadays is the same as it was when Allah originated it. For example, if someone drinks twenty tons of water in the course of his life; of course, he is not carrying all this water now. Definitely, it has left and evaporated from his body as; sweat, urine, mucus, earwax etc. and has begun a new cycle.

Then Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘... And it is to Him you will be returned’ (*ar-Rum*: 11). Allah is speaking about creation, but then the discourse moved from the third person singular (creation) to the second person plural (you). All creation unanimously agrees that they are all originated and recreated by Allah. Nevertheless, they differ in the manner in which they respond to Allah’s Message; there are believers, disbelievers, obedient, disobedient and those who are in the middle. Upon returning to Allah, this agreement will be split up into two different paths; that of the felicitous, and the other of the wretched. Thus, Allah uses the singular form in speaking of origination and recreation and changes to the plural form in speaking of returning to Him in different ways.

Successively, Allah *the Almighty* says:



**On the Day the Hour arrives, the guilty will
despair [12] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 12)**

‘... The guilty will despair’ (*ar-Rum*: 12) means that they will be silent as the person who has no further argument to suggest, unknowing what to say and finding no one to defend him, even his leaders and followers, who will have already begun their own torment. Therefore, he will have no hope of being saved, as Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘He will be at the forefront of his people on the Day of Resurrection...’ (*Hud*: 98). For that reason, Satan is named ‘Iblis’, taken from the Arabic root word *balas*: to despair because he despairs of Allah’s Mercy.

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘So, when they had forgotten the warning they had received, We opened the gates to everything for them.

Then, as they revelled in what they had been given, We struck them suddenly and they were dumbfounded.’ (*al-An‘am*: 44) This means that when they forgot Allah’s guidance, He punished them for this in this world. Thus, Allah firstly loosened the reins for them and gave them abundant worldly delights and allures, to have the severest punishment and to suffer the steep fall.

Similarly, the person would not take vengeance of his enemy when he is already down, but rather, he should first be raised up to administer the heaviest punishment. If Allah punished them at a time when they were already undergoing hardships and poverty, there would not be great difference between them; for poverty is close enough to torment.

Furthermore, it is noticed in Allah’s saying: ‘We opened... for them’ that He *the Almighty* uses the Arabic preposition ‘*ala*’ (translated as: ‘for them’) to express that the opening was not good for them. However, the preposition ‘*ala*’ refers in Arabic to ‘against’, meaning that the opening is contrary to their interest, such as in scoring points; ‘against’ means failure.

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُمْ مِّنْ شُرَكَائِهِمْ شُفَعَاءُ وَكَانُوا بِشُرَكَائِهِمْ كَافِرِينَ ﴿١٣﴾

**And they will have no intercessors among those partners
they ascribed to God – they will deny these partners [13]**

(The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 13)

Indeed, none of their ‘partners to Allah’ will intercede for them because the partners disassociate themselves from them, as Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘When those who have been followed disown their followers, when they all see the suffering, when all bonds between them are severed.’ (*al-Baqara*: 166)

Likewise, those followers will say, ‘The disbelievers will say, “Our Lord, show us those jinn and men who misled us and we shall trample them underfoot, so that they may be among the lowest of the low.”’ (*Fussilat*: 29)

The subject and object relationship is just like two bad students who wasted their time all year long in playing, distracted one another from their studies and encouraged each other to loiter around in the streets until the exam came and the bitter truth surprised them both. So, each of them cursed and reviled the other blaming each other for what happened.

When things become serious, all weak ties that bound the people of falsehood in this world will be severed, as Allah says, ‘... They will deny these partners’ (*ar-Rum*: 13). This will be done, since all the truth will have been revealed and the falseness and error of the wrongdoer will have become manifest.

Then, Allah *the Exalted* says:

وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ السَّاعَةُ يُنْفَرُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

**When the Hour arrives, on that Day people will
be separated [14] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 14)**

This means that those wrongdoers who grouped together in this world in the cause of evil and misguidance will be separated on the Day of Resurrection and will become enemies and adversaries after having been companions. The believers will be in a distinctive place far from the disbelievers; even the sinful believers who offered only the slightest good deeds will not be abandoned by other believers, but rather, they will intercede for them and bring them into their companionship.

The phrase ‘On that Day’ refers to the phrase ‘When the Hour arrives’ (*ar-Rum*: 14), so the meaning is ‘when the Last Hour arrives they will be separated.’

فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فَهُمْ فِي رَوْضَةٍ يُحْبَرُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

**Those who believed and did good deeds will delight
in a Garden [15] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 15)**

As long as people will be separated on the Day of Resurrection, there will be two sections; that of the believers and the other of the disbelievers. Therefore, this verse shows us the section of the believers and their reward in the Hereafter. A garden is a place filled with greenery, rivers, trees, and flowers; the matter which represents something rare for the Arabs because they lived in the desert where gardens and pastures were few.

Consequently, gardens and orchards are wondrous things and tremendous blessings for them. ‘Will delight’ refers to the joy felt on having a blessing. This is the reward of the believers in the Hereafter; the coming verse tackles the status of the disbelievers.

Allah *the Exalted* says:

وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَلِقَاءِ الْآخِرَةِ فَأُولَٰئِكَ فِي الْعَذَابِ مُحْضَرُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

**While those who disbelieved and denied Our messages
and the meeting of the Hereafter will be brought for
punishment [16] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 16)**

The phrase ‘Will be brought’ is passive, implying that someone is given over by another one else. This is only said in the case of an evildoer who is being convicted and found guilty; or else, he would have come of his own accord. This is a fearful expression of bad connotation because if someone is brought by another has only a bad reference. This is the status of the disbelievers and the deniers of the Day of Resurrection; the angels will drive them to attend the Hereafter unwillingly.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَسَبِّحْ لِلَّهِ حِينَ تُمْسُونَ وَحِينَ تُصْبِحُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

**So celebrate God’s glory in the evening, in the
morning [17] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 17)**

Hereby, the greatness of faith and Allah’s love for His creatures are manifested, as He calls them to glorify Him at all hours of the day and the night. Allah *the Exalted* asks His servants to believe in Him because He loves them and wills to abundantly grant them His blessings. Allah’s attributes of Perfection imply that He is utterly free of need of them, where the faith of the believer does not increase His kingdom nor does the disbelief decrease His kingdom.

Thus, Allah kindly treats and honours His creatures and servants, so He calls them to glorify Him. As previously illustrated; surely, to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection, if someone wanted to meet a highly ranked person, he should bear several appalling hardships during this meeting. First, he needs permission to meet the ranked person, then the time and the date that should be set, the duration, and the purpose of the meeting and perhaps he should even have to choose the exact words to be said. Additionally, the ranked person would end the meeting whenever he wants, rather than the person needing the meeting.

This is the case, if someone wants to meet another human being, so what about if he wants to meet Allah, the Creator (in prayer)? It is enough that He invites the people to His presence, makes this an absolutely obligatory request, seeks them before they seek Him and remembers them before they remember Him, not only once a day, but five times. If people answer His call, He showers them with His Mercy, blessings and manifestations. If a product is maintained five times a day by its producer, it will never be affected.

Additionally, the Lord leaves all details of this meeting up to the human being; he is free to choose the time, the place, the subject and the duration of the meeting, if the person wants to extend the duration, the Lord does not end it until the servant does. Therefore, the people of insight, who know Allah's Power and Generosity, and who know the importance of seeking His refuge, say:

It is enough honour as a subservient creature
Whose Lord welcomes without appointment:
Despite His Holiness and Magnificent nature
I can meet Him however and wherever I want.

Slavery is always disliked by human beings because being submissive to another human is a demeaning and humiliating relationship where the master exploits the resources of his slave. However, slavery or submissiveness to Allah is the pinnacle of honour because the human being, thus, benefits from the good of his Lord. Therefore, Allah honoured Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by ascribing this slavery to him (Messenger Muhammad), as He says, 'Limitless in His Glory is He who transported His servant...' (*al-Isra': 1*).

Thus, Allah's words: 'So, Glorify Allah...' are, in itself, worship and a glorification of Allah, as they absolve Allah from the allusion that anything could ever be like Him. So, the people of insight say: 'Whatever came to mind, Allah is other than that', because: '...There is nothing like Him...' (*ash-Shura: 11*).

Allah *the Exalted* is glorified in His Essence, Attributes, and Actions; however, if there is a shared attribute between Allah and the creation, it should be understood in the light of this verse: '... There is nothing like Him...' (*ash-Shura: 11*).

Scrutinising the root of the Arabic verb *sabbaha* (glorify) in the Quran, it is found in the beginning of the chapters of *al-Isra'*: 'Glory to Him who made His servant travel by night...' (*al-Isra'*: 1), *al-Hadid*: 'Everything in the heavens and earth glorifies Allah...' (*al-Hadid*: 1), and *al-Jumu'a*: 'Everything in the heavens and earth glorifies Allah...' (*al-Jumu'a*: 1).

Thus, Allah has been glorified in pre-eternity before He created anyone to glorify Him. Hence, as glorification is first confirmed for Allah and then the heavens and the earth have glorified Him unceasingly until now, so mankind should not deviate from this universal norm, but rather, you should also glorify Him, as the Quran says: '[Prophet], glorify the name of your Lord *the Most High*' (*al-A'la*: 1).

Likewise, everything in existence glorifies Him, as Allah says: '... There is not a single thing that does not glorify His praise, though you do not understand their praise...' (*al-Isra'*: 44). However, some scholars have tried to explain the glorification of the inanimate objects, which cannot be heard or felt, that it is simply a matter of their being signs of Allah. Refuting this thesis, if the glorification of the inanimate objects can be explained, thus, it is understood, but Allah *the Almighty* says: '... Though you do not understand their praise...' (*al-Isra'*: 44). This means that as long as Allah says that they glorify Him, thus, they indeed glorify Him incomprehensibly. Likewise, Allah has given us examples of ostensibly mute things glorifying Him; such as the mountains which glorified Him along with Dawud (David) *peace be upon him*. As Allah says, '... You mountains, echo Allah's praises together with him, and you birds, too...' (*Saba'*: 10). Moreover, Allah confirms that the ant and the hoopoe bird spoke, as well as He says about all creation in general: '... Each knows its [own way] of prayer and glorification...' (*an-Nur*: 41).

Subsequently, everything in existence glorifies Allah but in its distinctive language. If someone does not know French, for example, he would not understand it; although, it is a spoken language, with letters and sounds, and the person can hear it as he hears his own language.

The glorification of Allah is used to absolve Allah from any likeness to mankind. As Allah says, 'Glory to Him who made His servant travel by night...' (*al-Isra'*: 1). This means that Allah is absolved from any likeness to

mankind and from the laws that govern them, so people should not be astonished how Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* could have gone from Mecca to Jerusalem, then to the heavens and return back again in a single night.

With respect to the laws governing human beings, it would be difficult to understand such a thing. This was the case with the disbelievers of Mecca, when they doubted the Messenger and said, 'How could you claim to have gotten there in a single night, while we hardly get there on our camels within a month'.⁽¹⁾ They judged the matter and measured the distances according to their own standards, thus, they deemed this impossible and denied it.

As a people of rhetorical skills, if they had reflected on the verse: 'Glory to Him who made His servant travel...' (*al-Isra'*: 1), they would have realised that the Night Journey was not a result of Muhammad's power, but rather, it refers to Allah, Who 'made His servant travel'. So, Muhammad's human nature played no part in this matter, but rather, he was taken up by the power of Allah who raised him.

Allah is not restricted by the laws of time and space that govern human beings. Making this matter easier to be grasped, distance is covered in time that is proportionate to the means of transportation; the walking traveller is not like the one who rides an animal or the one who travels by car, plane, or rocket ship and so on.

If human law states that as power increases, time decreases; yet, Allah's Power is not the same where there is no time at all in this equation. But why did Allah mention time here, specifically that it occurred over one night? This is because the journey was not simply a matter of going and coming back, but rather, it was full of many incidents. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was shown many things and spoke with many prophets. These actions of the Messenger that took the time; yet, as for the departure and arrival, they took no time at all.

When this verse was revealed, people knew that plants were composed of pairs, because they used to pollinate palm trees; and they knew the same about human beings because they married and reared children; and they

(1) Narrated by Ibn Hisham in his *Sira*

knew it about animals too – and this was the limit of mankind’s knowledge of this dual polarity.

But the verse did not stop there, but rather added: ‘and in that of which [as yet] they have no knowledge’ because the future would reveal to them other things which share this polarity; and we now know that this phenomena exists in electricity, for example, where there are positive and negative charges, and in atoms where there are protons and electrons, and so on.

So when you hear expressions of glorification in the Quran, be aware that you are about to encounter something unique, completely unlike the actions of human beings, and not subject to the laws that govern you.

Then, He *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَهُ الْحَمْدُ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَعَشِيًّا وَحِينَ تُظْهِرُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

Praise is due to Him in the heavens and the earth – in the late afternoon, and at midday [18] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 18)

Notice that His statement ‘...unto Him is due all praise in the heavens and on earth...’ (*ar-Rum*: 18) comes between mention of specific times, so that ‘when you enter upon the evening hours, and when you rise at morn’ (*ar-Rum*: 17) is on one side of it, and ‘...in the afternoon as well, and when you enter upon the hour of noon’ (*ar-Rum*: 18) is on the other, despite the fact that they are all times of the day and night. Why is this? They say it is because Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to make us feel that praise is due to Him, and that we should praise Him for His being utterly without comparison because it is in our own best interests to do so, and we will gain the fruits of this glorification. If Allah wants good for you, there is no being like Him who could prevent Him from giving it to you, and He alone possesses the magnificence that protects you from anyone else trying to raise themselves above you, and to Him alone you submit and prostrate, and you bow down in prostration to none besides Him. Your prostration before your Lord suffices you of the need to prostrate to anyone else, as the poet said,

The one prostration that you assent to make

Saves you from thousands of other prostrations

So it is in your best interest that Allah be the only One Who is without equal, and the Strong next to whom there is no stronger, and the Proud by right, whose pride protects the weak from the pride of those who are stronger than them. You should praise Allah, who bade us worship Him by prostrating to Him alone, and submitting to Him alone because by this He saved you from the humiliation of having to prostrate yourself before all those who are stronger than you, and this is a sign of His greatness and the mercy He shows His creatures, and therefore it is right that He be praised for it.

So we say in our dialect, 'The one who does not have a guardian needs to go and get one,' because he cannot live an honourable life unless he has someone to protect him and defend him; likewise, you cannot have any honour except by your slavehood to Allah.

In Allah's eyes, all of mankind are equal, for He has no son or relative from amongst His servants, and He has no influences that might make Him prefer one over another, and we all share Allah. And so He says: 'no consort has He ever taken unto Himself, nor a son!' (*al-Jinn*: 3) That is, nothing can influence Him.

After mentioning glorification, He says '...unto Him is due all praise...' (*ar-Rum*: 18) because glorification should be followed by praise, so one says, 'Glory be to Allah, and praise be to Allah', that is, praise be to Allah that I am one of those who glorify Him.

If we reflect on the times in which Allah tells us to glorify Him, namely evening, morning, midday and afternoon (that is between mid-afternoon and sunset), we find that they are general times that always exist upon Allah's earth; so which morning is meant and which afternoon? Is it my morning, or the morning of others, my afternoon, or the afternoon of others somewhere else on earth?

If we reflect on the cycle of time, we will find that in every moment it is afternoon somewhere, and morning somewhere, and evening somewhere, and midday somewhere, this means that Allah is glorified and worshipped in every moment of time that passes.

In light of this, we can understand the saying of the Prophet *peace be upon him*: Allah stretches out His hand at night so the sinner of the day can repent, and

He stretches out His hand in the day so the sinner of the night can repent.⁽¹⁾ The earth is never without night or day, and this means that Allah's hand is always outstretched, and never withdrawn: 'Nay, but wide are His hands stretched out...' (*al-Ma'ida*: 64).

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

يُخْرِجُ الْحَيَّ مِنَ الْمَيِّتِ وَيُخْرِجُ الْمَيِّتَ مِنَ الْحَيِّ
وَيُحْيِي الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا وَكَذَلِكَ تُخْرَجُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

He brings the living out of the dead and the dead out of the living. He gives life to the earth after death, and you will be brought out in the same way [19] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 19)

Firstly, what has occasioned this mention of the Resurrection, and of bringing forth the living from the dead and the dead from the living, after mention was just made of the glorification and praise of Allah? They say it is because He spoke about morning and evening which both resemble life and death. In the evening, darkness falls, and people settle down and sleep, so it is a time of stillness, calm, and sleep, which is an image of death; that is why we call it the 'lesser death.' Morning, however, is a time of movement, and work, and the seeking of a living, and so it is full of life; Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and made the night [its] cloak. [10] And made the day [a symbol of] life [11]' (*an-Naba'*: 10-11).

Death and the Resurrection are represented by sleep and waking, as the saying goes, 'You will die just as you sleep, and you will be resurrected just as you wake.'

As we have seen these two states, and we have witnessed sleeping and waking for ourselves, we should take them as a sign of the Resurrection that will come after death; and if the Quran informs us of this, we should believe it, and let what we see be evidence for us of what we do not see; and this is what the verse tells us: 'He [it is who] brings forth the living out of that which is dead, and brings forth the dead out of that which is alive...' (*ar-Rum*: 19).

(1) Narrated by Muslim on the authority of Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari Allah be pleased with him

The words 'alive' and 'dead' here refer to our understanding, and our knowledge of how things are, for in reality everything in existence has its own life, and no true death exists except in the Hereafter, about which Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...Everything is bound to perish, save His [eternal] Self...' (*al-Qasas*: 88). To 'perish' is the opposite of to live, as is borne out by Allah's words: '...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).

Since everything will perish save Allah, this means that everything must be alive, but with a life that is specially its own. I remember when they taught us how magnetism works, and how to magnetise a piece of iron by rubbing it in one direction against another piece that was magnetised, and indeed we saw how the iron would become magnetised itself.

You could then attract other pieces of metal to it: is this not a sign of life? There is movement in these objects we believe to be inanimate and lifeless, and they react to one another, and within them are atoms which move in a fixed way, governed by their own laws.

So we say that everything in existence has its own special kind of life, even if we ourselves are unaware of it because we perceive that life only exists in those things we consider as living beings, whilst in reality there is life in everything; if you do not understand the nature of the life of these things, that is something else.

And so Prophet Solomon (Sulaiman) *peace be upon him* heard the speech of the ant, and how she understood, and stood as a sentry for her colony, and understood the movement of the army and what would happen if they stood in its way, and so warned her colony to return home, and how she was wise and fair in her words: '...“lest Solomon (Sulaiman) and his hosts crush you without [even] being aware!”...' (*an-Naml*: 18) She knew that if the army crushed the ants, it would be unintentional on their part, and when Solomon (Sulaiman) *peace be upon him* heard this he became aware of how Allah has blessed him by giving him knowledge that no other man possessed, and so he said: '...“O my Lord! Inspire me so that I may forever be grateful for those blessings of Thine with which You have graced me and my parents”...' (*an-Naml*: 19).

So ‘He [it is who] brings forth the living out of that which is dead...’ (*ar-Rum*: 19) refers to our customary understanding of life and death. Some say that it means that Allah brings eggs out of chickens, and chickens from eggs, but this does not make sense because does every egg necessarily produce a chicken? No, because it should be a fertilised egg. So do not narrow your understanding down just to the example of chickens and eggs, but rather say that He brings the living forth from the dead in everything that exists.

Then, He *Glorified is He* says ‘...and brings forth the dead out of that which is alive...’ (*ar-Rum*: 19). Elsewhere in the Quran He says: ‘...bringing forth the living out of that which is dead, and He is the One who brings forth the dead out of that which is alive...’ (*al-An‘am*: 95). Here, He used the active participle *mukhrij* ‘The One Who brings forth’ instead of using the present tense verb.

Some of those who are doubtful about the rhetorical style of the Quran have objected, saying, ‘If one of these is eloquent, the other must not be.’ This is a natural result of their lack of understanding of the language of the Quran because they do not understand Arabic well enough to appreciate Allah’s speech.

About this matter, we say, ‘the one speaking here is the Lord, who gives every word its proper due, and places every word in its proper place, where no other word would do.’

When Allah *Glorified is He* says ‘...He [it is who] brings forth the living out of that which is dead...’ (*al-An‘am*: 95) who does this benefit? It benefits us because people naturally love life, and some of them might be proud of it, and become deluded in their pride, as our Lord says: ‘Nay, verily, man becomes grossly overweening [6] Whenever he believes himself to be self-sufficient [7]’ (*al-‘Alaq*: 6-7).

And so our Lord reminds them of the opposite, saying, just as I bring the living forth from the dead, so I bring the dead forth from the living too, so be aware of this, and be careful not to be proud or arrogant, and understand that life is a gift for you from your Lord, which He can take away at any time.

Allah *Glorified is He* expresses this reality either by using the present tense verb ‘(He) brings forth’, which implies continuity and renewal, or by using

the active participle '(He is) the One Who brings forth', which indicates the fixed nature of the attribute and its constant application to the One being described, and so it is not only describing a finite action.

And so notice that Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Hallowed be He in whose hand all dominion rests, since He has the power to will anything: He who has created death as well as life, so that He might put you to a test [and thus show] which of you is best in conduct' (*al-Mulk*: 1-2).

We might think that life should be mentioned before death, but the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to eliminate mankind's delusions about life, and so He preceded mention of life by mentioning that which is in direct contradistinction with it, and so says: 'He who has created death as well as life' (*al-Mulk*: 2). He mentions death before life, so before you think about life, think about death, so you will not be deluded, and you will not transgress.

This concept is also manifested in Allah's words: 'Have you ever considered that [seed] which you emit? [58] Is it you who create it – or are We the source of its creation? [59] We have [indeed] decreed that death shall be [ever-present] among you: but there is nothing to prevent Us [60]' (*al-Waqi'a*: 58-60).

That is, 'Be aware and understand that I give life, and I can take it away, so do not be deluded by it, and be not tyrants.' It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to eliminate the attributes of pride and arrogance from the human soul, and so He always makes this contrast between remembrance of death and life in the verses of the Noble Quran. Moreover, do you not see that the Creator *Glorified is He* did not make death dependent on the causes of age, so that one person might die before they are even born, whilst another dies after a few days or months, and another dies after a number years, and another after a century? So death has no determined cause except Allah's decree, and the appointed time He set, and this is a sign to mankind: Beware, for the life from which your delusions spring might be taken from you at any moment, without you even realising it, and without any prior warning or precursors; so cleave to your Lord's guidance, and do not dare to sin because you might die before it occurs to you to repent.

And so they say that when the True Lord *Glorified is He* concealed from us the exact moment of our deaths; this concealment made death all the more

apparent to us. How? It is because if He told you the exact time you will die, you would only prepare for death shortly before it happened, whereas by concealing it, He has inspired you to prepare for it every moment of your life.

Then, He says: ‘and gives life to the earth after it had been lifeless’. Elsewhere in the Quran, He says: ‘And [if, O man, you are still in doubt as to resurrection, consider this:] you can see the earth dry and lifeless – and [suddenly,] when We send down waters upon it, it stirs and swells and puts forth every kind of lovely plant!’ (*al-Hajj*: 5) So the earth is dead and lifeless and dry, with no sign of life in it, but when the rain falls upon it, it springs to life, and produces all manner of lovely plants; and this is a direct example of the creation of life for all to see.

In another verse, He says: ‘Are you not aware that it is Allah who sends down water from the skies, whereupon the earth becomes green?’ (*al-Hajj*: 63) Does the earth become green the moment the rain falls upon it? No, it happens after a period of time, so it is as though Allah were saying to you, ‘Look at what happens, and imagine it: after the rain falls, the earth becomes green little by little, even though you did not plant any seeds there because it is full of seeds the wind has carried which then settled in the soil and remained there, even for years ready to grow, waiting for water in order to fulfil their purpose.’

People who live in the desert witness this phenomenon, and we saw it at Mount ‘Arafat after rain fell upon it and we returned after a few years to find the land covered with green. So do not think that every crop that grows was planted by a human being, for if this was the case, where did the first seeds man planted come from? There are many crops that grow without man playing any part.

Read the story of Mary (Maryam) *Allah be pleased with her*: ‘And lo! The angels said: “O Mary (Maryam)! Behold, Allah has elected you and made you pure, and raised you above all the women of the world”...’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 42).

He did not say from whom Mary (Maryam) *Allah be pleased with her* had been elected, so the meaning is that she was elected from all humanity by being purified by Allah, and made virtuous, and pious, and righteous, and so

on. As for the second use of the verb *istafa* (to elect, to raise), it did not refer to all people, but to all women, because she alone amongst all women would be mother to a child conceived with no father.

The reason we are mentioning this is that Joseph (Yusuf) the carpenter⁽¹⁾, when he saw that Mary (Maryam) *Allah be pleased with her* was with child, knowing who she was, and that she had never left the prayer-niche her whole life, never imagined that there was anything untoward going on; but he wanted to ask Mary (Maryam) *Allah be pleased with her* to explain what was happening. So he asked her with good manners, 'Mary, did any tree ever grow from no seed?' She replied, under inspiration from Allah. 'Indeed it did: the tree that produced the first seed.'

So the True Lord *Glorified is He* reminds us of His blessing, and then reminds us that He has the power to take it away and end it, in order that we do not become deluded by it. This is not only the case with life and death, but also in the case of crops, and water, and fire, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Have you ever considered that [seed] which you emit? [58] Is it you who create it – or are We the source of its creation? [59] We have [indeed] decreed that death shall be [ever-present] among you: but there is nothing to prevent Us [60] from changing the nature of your existence and bringing you into being [anew] in a manner [as yet] unknown to you. [61] And [since] you are indeed aware of the [miracle of your] coming into being in the first instance – why, then, do you not bethink yourselves [of Us]? [62] Have you ever considered the seed which you cast upon the soil? [63] Is it you who cause it to grow – or are We the cause of its growth? [64] [For] were it Our will, We could indeed turn it into chaff, and you would be left to wonder [and to lament], [65] "Verily, we are ruined! [66] Nay, but we have been deprived [of our livelihood]!" [67] Have you ever considered the water which you drink? [68] Is it you who cause it to come down from the clouds – or are We the cause of its coming down? [69] [It comes down sweet – but] were it Our will, We could make it burningly salty and bitter: why, then, do you not give thanks [unto Us]? [70] Have you ever considered the fire which you kindle?

(1) The story of Joseph (Yusuf) *peace be upon him* asking Mary (Maryam) *peace be upon her*: "Is there a tree without seeds?"

[71] Is it you who have brought into being the tree that serves as its fuel – or are We the cause of its coming into being? [72]’ (*al-Waqi‘a*: 58-72)

Notice the precision of the Quran’s rhetorical style here in the phrase ‘We could indeed turn it into chaff’ where the word ‘indeed’ is used in the case of crops because human beings play a part in their production by ploughing and sowing and watering, perhaps thinking that they themselves have power over this.

But when He speaks about water, He says ‘were it Our will, We could make it burningly salty and bitter’ without saying ‘indeed’. Why is this? It is because no one plays any part in the bringing of rain, nor does anyone even claim to. You did not evaporate the water, or send down the rain, and so He says simply ‘we could make it’ without any emphasis.

And when He mentions fire as one of His blessings, He does not mention the possibility of its disappearance. He says: ‘Is it you who have brought into being the tree that serves as its fuel – or are We the cause of its coming into being?’ (*al-Waqi‘a*: 72)

He did not then say, for example, ‘If We willed, We could extinguish it.’ Why not? They say it was so that the image of fire would be of its blazing before us forever, never going out, as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* was using it to alert every sinner so that they might return to their senses.

Then He says: ‘and even thus will you be brought forth’. ‘Even thus’ is an allusion to what has just been mentioned about the revival of the earth after its death: in the same way, you will be brought forth and resurrected. So whoever denies the Resurrection let him consider how the hard earth is revived with plants when rain falls upon it.

وَمِنْ ءَايَاتِهِ ۚ أَنْ خَلَقَكُمْ مِّنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ إِذَا أَنَسُمْ بَشَرٌ تَنْشُرُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾

And among His One of His signs is that He created you from dust and – lo and behold! – you became human and scattered far and wide [20] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 20)

This refers to the beginning of creation. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And among His wonders is this: He creates you...’ (*ar-Rum*: 20) addressing us in

the plural form, whilst the ultimate meaning is the creation of Adam and Eve *peace be upon them*, from whom Allah brought forth many men and women.

If we consider the world today, with all its billions of people, and follow it back into the past, it will eventually come back to two people, Adam and Eve *peace be upon them*. When they met, they produced offspring; but did this progeny come from lifeless matter that came from Adam *peace be upon him* or from living matter in the form of living sperm?

If the sperm were dead, procreation would not have taken place; so the sons of Adam *peace be upon him* came from sperms from their father, Adam, and spread throughout the earth, and reproduced, each one of them carrying atoms from their original father, Adam *peace be upon him*. Moreover, each one of us has within him living atoms from the time of Adam, and they have still not come to an end. This is the atomic realm that witnessed Allah's creation of Adam *peace be upon him* and the parts of us that witnessed the first pact made between creation and the Creator, *glorified is He*: 'And whenever thy 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: "Yes, indeed, we do bear witness thereto!" [Of this We remind you,] lest you say on the Day of Resurrection, "Verily, we were unaware of this"' (*al-A'raf*: 172).

So within each of us, now and until the Day of Resurrection there lies a living atom from our father Adam *peace be upon him* which is the atom that witnessed this pact, and the one that represents the natural disposition of faith in every human soul, but this natural disposition is covered over by heedlessness, and sin, and so on.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us that He creates everything and brings them into existence by saying 'Be!' His Being alone is such that when He wills a thing to be, He but says unto it, "Be" – and it is' (*Ya Sin*: 82).

All except for mankind, for his Lord honoured him by fashioning him with His own hands, and making him His vicegerent on earth, and manifesting within him His attributes, giving him strength from His Strength, and knowledge from His Knowledge, and wisdom from His Wisdom, and riches from His Riches.

When our Lord *Glorified is He* created us in this way, He wanted us to use these attributes He gave us in the same way He Himself uses them. By His power, Allah created for us that which benefits us; and so you, with the power Allah gave you, must also strive to do beneficial things. And by His wisdom, Allah arranged all things; and so you by your own wisdom should strive to arrange things; and so on.

But it must be understood that these powers are different: there is a power that works for you, and a higher power that causes you to work for yourself. Suppose you meet a weak man who is unable to carry his load, and so you carry it for him: in doing so, you have loaned the effects of your own power to him, whilst he himself remains weak.

As for The True Lord *the Exalted* He does not only lend the effects of His power to His servants, but also lends him the power itself, and in doing so He strengthens the weak so he can carry his load by himself.

So it is a great honour to mankind that the Creator *Glorified is He* says: ‘I created him with My own hands’, as He said to Satan (Iblis): ...“O Satan (Iblis)! What has kept you from prostrating yourself before that [being] which I have created with My hands?”...’ (*Sad*: 75)

It is up to you, mankind, after this great honour, to either honour yourselves as Allah has honoured you, or else to bring yourselves as low as can be: you will end up wherever you choose to put yourself.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Verily, We create man in the best conformation;[4] and thereafter We reduce him to the lowest of low [5] excepting only such as attain to faith and do good deeds [6]’ (*at-Tin*: 4-6). So choose for yourself which of the two positions you wish to take.

The phrase ‘out of dust’ refers to the origin from which Adam *peace be upon him* was created. When dust is mixed with water, it makes mud, and if its smell changes it becomes fetid mire, and if it dries, it becomes clay like that of a potter; and these are the stages through which the human being went as it was created, all of which are different forms of dust or soil, and different states which it took.

So if anyone tries to say that creation took place in a different way, do not believe them because the One Who created mankind has informed them of how He did so; as for these others, they did not witness any part of mankind's creation, and in the eyes of the religion they are people who lead others astray, and their ideas should be treated with caution, because Allah *Glorified is He* says about such as them: '...and neither do I [have any need to] take as My helpers those [beings] that lead [men] astray' (*al-Kahf*: 51).

By Allah, if scientists had never been concerned with the issue of creation, whether of mankind, or the sun and moon and earth and so on, and we had never heard of Darwin's theory, would this verse have been truthful? If not, they would have said, 'Where are these people who lead others astray that the Quran mentions here?' And so they announced their theories to us, attempting to deny Allah's religion and spread doubts about it, though all the while they were proving the truth of it without realising.

Similar to these are those people who try to cast doubt on the narrated sayings of the Prophet *peace be upon him* doubting their authenticity. In reality, this is a natural phenomenon that proves the truthfulness of the Prophet because he *peace be upon him* was not unaware of this matter, but rather told us and warned us about it, and gave us an immunity to it, and he gave us the 'triple immunisation', like the one we are now hearing about from doctors.

He *peace be upon him* said, 'There will come a man from amongst my nation who will lie on his couch, speaking about my sayings and will say: "You and we all have the Book of Allah, and so what we find permissible therein we will permit, and what we find forbidden therein we will forbid" – yet indeed, what the Prophet forbids is like what Allah forbids.'⁽¹⁾

Why is this? It is because Allah *Glorified is He* gave him the right to legislate for his community, saying: '...Hence, accept [willingly] whatever the Apostle gives you [thereof], and refrain from [demanding] anything that he withholds from you...' (*al-Hashr*: 7).

(1) Narrated by Ahmad, At-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, and Ad-Daraqatni, on the authority of Al-Miqdam Allah be pleased with him

So the Messenger has the right to command, and to issue commandments and prohibitions, which must be obeyed just as Allah is obeyed. So any who denies the importance of the *Sunnah*, and says we only need the Quran, ask him, when he prays the sunset prayer, how many cycles he prayed. He will say that he prayed three. So how did he know that the sunset prayer is three cycles? Did he know it from the Quran that he argues for, or from the *Sunnah* that he denies? So how could he base his worship on the statements of the Prophet, and then deny them?

So the True Lord *Glorified is He* explained to us the stages of human creation from dust which became mud which then became mire, then to become clay like that of a potter; Allah then blew an aspect of His Spirit into it. We did not witness any of this, but rather, He informed us of it; and in the mercy He extends to His creatures so that their minds would not be confused by looking into this matter, He gave us signs in the universe we witness to explain to us the unseen that we do not witness.

In our own customary understanding, the destruction of something occurs contrary to its formation so that the first thing to be formed is destroyed last, and the last thing to be formed is destroyed first. You did not witness the first creation, but you can witness death; and death is the opposite of life.

Reflect on how a person dies. The first thing that happens to the body is the exit of the spirit, which was the last thing to be added when it was formed. Then the body becomes firm and hard, just as it was when it was in the clay stage; then it rots and its odour changes, just as occurred in the putrid mire stage; then the earth absorbs all the moisture in it so that it becomes dust, just as it was when its Creator began it. So Allah was truthful when He showed us how death occurs; so we trust Him in what He said about life.

Just as dust and mud are the sources of man, they are also his source of sustenance and development, and stores for his nutrition. They represent one of the basic constituents of our lives, and so when Allah mentions soil in the Quran, He says: ‘Say: “Would you indeed deny Him who has created the earth in two aeons? And do you claim that there is any power that could rival Him, the Lord of all the worlds?”’[9] For He [it is who, after creating the earth,] placed firm mountains on it, [towering] above its surface, and bestowed [so many] blessings on it... [10]’ (*Fussilat*: 9-10).

‘For He [it is who, after creating the earth,] placed firm mountains on it, [towering] above its surface, and bestowed [so many] blessings on it...’ (*Fussilat*: 10), that is, either in the mountains (since “it” here in Arabic could also mean ‘them’) since they are the last thing mentioned, or else on the earth in general, because the mountains are on the earth, ‘...and equitably apportioned its means of subsistence...’ (*Fussilat*: 10).

So our means of subsistence come to us from the clay of the earth, and the soil that crumbles from the mountains and becomes silt that is washed down to us by rain. So the earth is our true mother, from which we were created, and from which come the basic constituents of our life.

It is amazing that some non-Muslim scientists confirm the truth of the Quran in the matter of mankind’s creation from clay when they analysed the components of the earth and found them to be sixteen components, all of which are found in the human body. It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* uses certain people to prove the truth of His signs, even if they are disbelievers.

And Allah Almighty speaks the truth when He says: ‘In time We shall make them fully understand Our messages [through what they perceive] in the utmost horizons [of the universe] and within themselves, so that it will become clear unto them that this [revelation] is indeed the truth...’ (*Fussilat*: 53).

The Quran contains verses that illustrate proportions which, if a modern computer were to search for them, we would have to believe that this speech is from Allah, and that it is the truth.

Consider the phenomenon of language, how we speak and understand one another. If you never learned Arabic, for example, you will not understand the one who speaks it, and he will not understand you. Why is this? It is because language is the product of imitation, and so the tongue repeats what the ear hears; and it is a social phenomenon, so if a person lived alone his whole life he would not need language, because he will simply do whatever occurs to him, and nothing more.

If he lives with others, he must be able to communicate with them, taking from them and giving to them, hearing them and having them hear him. Even

mute people need some kind of language with which to communicate with those around them, and so they use sign language which Allah has made them capable of understanding.

Allah *Glorified is He* also allows people who can speak to communicate in this way, as in the case when you are forced to speak with food in your mouth, and so you signal with your hand to your son, or your servant, for example, and they understand what you mean and do as you ask.

So even we who can speak have within us elements of muteness which we can put into use when we are unable to speak. Communication is therefore an essential thing, and language is the product of imitation. This is why you tell your young son not to go out into the street, so that he does not hear vile speech and imitate it.

So how did I learn language? I learned it from my father, and those around me; and my father learned it from his father, and those around him, and so on. You can follow this chain back just as you can with the matter of human procreation, and you will eventually get back to our father Adam *peace be upon him* upon which you might ask who taught Adam *peace be upon him* language, to which the Quran replies: ‘And He imparted unto Adam the names of all things...’ (*al-Baqara*: 31).

This is a logical, inductive statement which clearly shows the truth of the verses of the Quran.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...and then, lo! You become human beings ranging far and wide...’ (*ar-Rum*: 20). The word ‘then’ here means after Allah created us from dust, the human race increased rapidly because the word ‘lo!’ here indicates something sudden, as when someone says, ‘I went out, and lo! There was a lion standing by the door!’ That is, it surprised me. So the meaning is: You reproduce and increase throughout the land rapidly.

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

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ
 بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

Another of His signs is that He created spouses from among yourselves for you to live with in tranquillity: He ordained love and kindness between you. There truly are signs in this for those who reflect [21] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 21)

We said that a wonder (*aya*) means something amazing that dazzles and astounds the mind and provokes certainty in the wisdom of the Creator. One of these amazing wonders is that ‘...He creates for you mates out of your own kind...’ (*ar-Rum*: 21), that is, of your own species and type.

So Allah *Glorified is He* did not will that reproduction should take place between humans and cows, for example, but rather between humans and other humans, differing from one another only in their gender, either male or female. Difference in gender is a difference of mutual completion, not a difference of struggle and conflict. Women are characterised by gentleness, mildness, and compassion, whilst men are characterised by strength and roughness, and so she is pleased by his strength and masculinity, and he is pleased by her softness and femininity, and this causes the mutual completion that Allah willed and intended as the means for the human race to increase.

It is curious that some people think that masculinity is the ‘opposite’ of femininity, trying to sow meaningless emotional conflict between the two. Masculinity and femininity are two necessary, mutually completing realities, like night and day, which are two signs that all people accept; do we try and compare night and day, and decide which of them is best? So reflect on the precision of the Quranic discourse when it mentions night and day and masculinity and femininity on the same occasion, and think deeply about the meaning of this: ‘Consider the night as it veils [the earth] in darkness, [1] and the day as it rises bright! [2] Consider the creation of the male and the female! [3] Verily, [O men,] you aim at most divergent ends! [4]’ (*al-Layl*: 1-4)

That is, each of them is different, and has its own purpose, just as night brings repose and stillness, and day brings action and work, and by the integration of each of your roles, higher integration comes.

So there is no need for me to seek equality with women, or for a woman to seek equality with men; we have been given headaches by those who call for this supposed ‘equality’, which is utterly meaningless in the light of Allah’s words: ‘Verily, [O men,] you aim at most divergent ends!’ (*al-Layl*: 4)

It is strange that we hear even men saying that women should take the place of men and fulfil their roles, to which we say: A woman cannot take on the role of a man unless a man can take on the role of a woman becoming pregnant as she does, and bearing children as she does, and suckling them as she does; so spare us from the calls of the ‘bullies’, who are lauded for that of which they have no comprehension.

Similar to this are Allah’s words: ‘Indeed, there has come unto you [O mankind] an Apostle from among yourselves...’ (*at-Tawba*: 128). That is, from your own human kind, so he was a soul with all the usual human abilities, in order that he could be a model for others; if the Messenger had been an angel, he could not have been a role model, and people would have said, ‘This is an angel, and we cannot do what he can.’ Or, ‘from among yourselves’ means from the Arabs, and the Quraysh.

Some people think that ‘out of your own kind’ here means Eve’s (*Hawwaa*’s) creation from Adam’s rib, thus being a part of us; but ‘out of your own kind’ here is directed to males and females alike, just as the word ‘mates’ refers to both men and women. Some people think that a ‘mate’ (*zawj*) means two people, but in reality it means one of a pair, which is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...and created thereon two sexes of every [kind of] plant...’ (*ar-Ra’d*: 3).

In the past, we used to think that a foetus’ gender was determined by either the woman’s fluid or the man’s, but the Quran tells us: ‘Was he not once a [mere] drop of sperm that had been spilt?’ (*al-Qiyama*: 37) So the woman has nothing to do with determining the gender of the foetus, whether it is male or female; both masculinity and femininity are determined by the fluid of the man.

Modern science has since confirmed this; and so the meaning of ‘He creates for you mates out of your own kind’ (*ar-Rum*: 21) is that they are created from the male side of the pairing, from which are created the XX and XY chromosomes, as modern science terms them, meaning male and female.

In connection with this, we mentioned before the story⁽¹⁾ of Abu Hamza, the Arab who took another wife because the first bore him no male children and he forsook her for this reason, and as a way of criticising this reasoning, she said, with eloquent Arabic, with words that prove that the ancient Arabs had knowledge of this fact, which modern science has recently proven,

Why does Abu Hamza not come to us,

Angry that we bore him no sons?

By Allah, such things are not in our hands:

We are but a tilth of lands to our farmers,

Giving to them the fruit of that which they had sown

By this, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to say: 'I desire a vicegerent who shall multiply and fill this wide earth.' So if you see a place that is too cramped for its inhabitants, know that there is another place that is empty, and that the problem is the poor distribution of Allah's creatures in Allah's earth.

And so they say the cause for all crises is that a land has no people, or that a people have no land. We gave the example before of the fertile lands of Sudan which no one is farming, and which if farmed would suffice the whole Arab world, whilst we live in the valleys and the delta until it cramps us. Yet if I decided to immigrate to those empty places, I would meet the problems of the boundaries set by men, for which Allah gave no authority.

And so when I was given the opportunity to speak at the United Nations, I said to them: There is one verse in the Book of Allah which, if you implemented it, would solve all the economic problems of the world, which is Allah's words: 'And the earth has He spread out for all living beings' (*ar-Rahman*: 10). So the whole earth is for the people, absolutely all the people.

Read what Allah *Glorified is He* said about this matter: '... Was, then, Allah's earth not wide enough for you to forsake the domain of evil?' (*an-Nisa*': 97) So do not violate Allah's way and His decree in His laws, and then complain about corruption, congestion, and crisis: if you consider the universe as a

(1) The story of Abu Hamza and his wife

whole, you will find that there is no corruption within it except where the hand of man has interfered with it against the laws and way of the Creator of the universe. As for those things in which mankind have not interfered, you will see that they are in perfect order, with no disturbances or conflicts.

So problems and crises only come about as a result of our acting in the universe contrary to Allah's guidance, and in violation of His law. And you hear people say, 'Life is wretched', and nothing comes to mind when you hear these words except the problem of poverty. Yet, 'wretched' means a lot more than just poverty, for some people are wealthy, and comfortable, and living in luxury, yet, they are still in a state of extreme wretchedness.

Look at Sweden, for example, which is one of the wealthiest countries on earth, yet has high numbers of madness, homosexuality, and psychological problems, and where suicide rates are high because of the wretchedness people experience there, even though they are wealthy and have high incomes.

So it is not a matter of economic situation, but rather a case of Allah's guidance not being implemented or put into practice; and Allah *Glorified is He* speaks the truth when He says: 'But as for him who shall turn away from remembering Me – his shall be a life of narrow scope; and on the Day of Resurrection We shall raise him up blind' (*Ta Ha*: 124).

And so if we live according to Allah's guidance, we will find life's sweetness even if we are impoverished.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'so that you might find rest with them'. This is the primary function of marriage, that the husband and wife find rest with one another; and rest comes after activity, for the man has spent his day working and earning a living with toil and strain, and so he wants to spend the end of the day inclining towards someone who will give him rest and repose, and no one but his wife can give him this comfort, warmth, and love, wherein he can find repose and prepare for the next day's labour.

But imagine that a man comes home tired and does not find this repose, but rather finds his wife, and the place he is supposed to find rest and comfort, actually makes him even more tired, and spoils his calm. So women must strive to understand the meaning of 'rest' here, and do their duty so that life will be in order.

But it is not only a matter of rest, but also ‘...He engenders love and tenderness between you...’ (*ar-Rum*: 21). Love means mutual affection in the partnership of life. The man strives and works to provide life’s needs, and the woman strives to keep the household in order and raise the children because Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Verily, [O men,] you aim at most divergent ends!’ (*al-Layl*: 4) And all this takes place in an atmosphere of love and mutual affection.

As for ‘tenderness’, it is mentioned last: rest, love, and tenderness. This is because human beings tend towards constant change, their states always shifting; the strong can become weak, and the rich can become poor, and a beautiful woman can change with time, or be struck down by illness, and so on.

And so the Quran makes us aware that there might come a phase when we lose our love, and lose our affection; yet tenderness will suffice at such times, so that the husband is tender with his wife if she is no longer able to do all the things she used to, and the wife is tender with her husband if he becomes ill, or impoverished, and so on.

Many elderly Allah-fearing people who pay heed to these teachings live their married lives according to this principle of tenderness, and so when people make insinuations to a woman whose husband has been made infirm by illness, she says, ‘Is it fit that I should benefit from him at times of ease, then forsake him when he is in trouble?’ Such is the truly religious woman, which brings us back to the saying of the Prophet *peace be upon him* about choosing a wife: ‘A woman is married for four things: her wealth, her noble birth, her beauty’ – and all of these are temporary delights – ‘and her religion; so choose the one who is religiously committed, may you prosper.’⁽¹⁾ So both you and she are subject to change, and you will not remain forever as you are now, and so you should both refer to something firm, and a neutral way which is not influenced by any caprice that might favour one of you over the other; a way of guidance in which you are equal – and you will only find this with the religion of Allah.

(1) Narrated by Ahmad, Abu-Dawud, and Ibn-Majah, on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him

And so the Prophet *peace be upon him* warned us: 'If there comes to you he whose religion and character please you, marry him (to your daughters); if you do not, there will be wickedness in the land, and much corruption.'⁽¹⁾

So beware of saying, when your wife gets older, that she is no longer physically attractive to you because Allah made wives to be a source of rest and comfort for you, and so if your instinctive desires are aroused, as is natural, you will find a way to satiate them, as the Prophet *peace be upon him* said: 'If any of you sees a woman who attracts him' – that is, who provokes his desire – 'he should go to his wife, for she has the same as the other has.'⁽²⁾

As long as the couple act according to the standards of the religion, and conduct themselves with the good manners of the religion, they will each be pleased with the other, and even though physical beauty will fade, spiritual beauty and dignity will remain, and the woman will retain the beauty of her character and behaviour; and every time you think of her faithfulness to you, and her devotion in serving you, and her eagerness to give you the comforts of life, and her concern for maintaining the honour of your home, you will become closer to her, and love her more and more.

The same is the case for the wife. And so every stage of life has its own attractions and beauty, which make up for those that came and went before.

And since the usual case for women is that their age shows on them more than in the case of men, the husband should treat this matter delicately; and so when someone told Al-Hasan *Allah be pleased with him* (the Prophet's grandson) that a man had asked for his daughter's hand in marriage, and then described the man to him, he replied, 'Do not marry her to any but a believing man: if he loves her, he will treat her with honour; and if he dislikes her, he will not wrong her.'

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...in this, behold, there are messages indeed for people who think' (*ar-Rum*: 21). They think about these matters, and about these stages, through which married life passes, and how Allah has

(1) Narrated by At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah, on the authority of Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him*

(2) Narrated by Ahmad and Muslim on the authority of Jabir *Allah be pleased with him*

given us mates from our own kind, not from another species, and how He has built this relationship on the foundations of rest, love, and affection, and then in the stage of old age on the tenderness with which the married couple must live for their entire lives together.

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

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافَ أَلْسِنَتِكُمْ
وَالْوَلَدِكُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّلْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٢٢﴾

Another of His signs is the creation of the heavens and earth, and the diversity of your languages and colours. There truly are signs in this for those who know [22] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 22)

There are many signs in the creation of the heavens and the earth, of which the most readily apparent to us is that they stand without any visible means of support, as Allah says elsewhere in the Quran: ‘He [it is who] has created the skies without any supports that you could see...’ (*Luqman*: 10).

So the sky that we see spread out over the horizons stands without means of any physical support;⁽¹⁾ and if you like you can travel throughout the earth and search for these supports, and you will never see them. Or, ‘without any supports that you could see’ means that these supports do exist, but that they cannot be seen.⁽²⁾

Yet logic dictates that a high thing must have either some kind of support to hold it up from below, or a power that holds it up from above. And so we must consider other verses together with this one in order to make sense of this matter. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, elsewhere in the Quran: ‘Verily, it is Allah [alone] who upholds the celestial bodies and the earth, lest they deviate...’ (*Fatir*: 41).

So the sky rests on no support, but rather, its Creator *the Exalted* holds it from above, so that it cannot fall to the ground unless He wills it. Do not be

(1) This is the opinion of Al-Hasan and Qutada.

(2) This is the opinion of Ibn Abbas, ‘Ikrima, and Mujahid.

amazed at such a thing, for Allah has given us a similitude for this that we can see for ourselves, as He says: ‘Have, then, they [who deny the truth] never considered the birds, enabled [by Allah] to fly in mid-air, with none but Allah holding them aloft? ...’ (*an-Nahl*: 79) If you say that the thing which keeps them in the sky is the movement of their wings and the way they flap them against the air, which means they are keeping themselves in the sky, we say: They are also kept in the sky without moving their wings; if you like, read: ‘Have they, then, never beheld the birds above them, spreading their wings and drawing them in? ...’ (*al-Mulk*: 19) So you can see birds in the air with their wings outstretched hovering in one place without moving, yet they do not fall to the earth; and so nothing keeps them in the air except Allah’s power.

Take what you see as evidence of what you cannot see. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Greater indeed than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the earth...’ (*Ghafir*: 57). This is so even though they were created to serve mankind.

So, although, O mankind, you are a manifestation of Allah’s power, and the entire Greater World is rolled up within you, your life span is short, and amounts to nothing next to the life of the earth, and the sky, and the sun, and the moon, and so on.

Then the discourse turns once more to another of Allah’s signs which is manifested in the human being: ‘and the diversity of your tongues and colours’ (*ar-Rum*: 22). The word ‘tongue’ means language, as in Allah’s word: ‘in the clear Arabic tongue’ (*ash-Shu’ara*: 195).

And his words: ‘...the tongue of him to whom they so maliciously point is wholly outlandish, whereas this is Arabic speech, clear [in itself] and clearly showing the truth’ (*an-Nahl*: 103). It also means of course the well-known appendage. The reason the word ‘tongue’ is used to mean language is that most language requires the use of the tongue and the sounds it makes, although the tongue only plays one simple part in the process of speech, being joined in this by the mouth, and the teeth, and the lips, and the vocal cords, and so on. However, the tongue is the main support of all these actions; and so ‘diversity of tongues’ means diversity of languages.

We said before that language is a social phenomenon that a person picks up from the environment around him, and that if we follow it back we will arrive at our father Adam *peace be upon him*. We also said that Allah is the One Who taught Adam *peace be upon him* language when He taught him the names of everything, and then Adam *peace be upon him* and his progeny used these names to communicate with each other, and added to them new names.

And so with our children, for example: we teach them nouns, the names of things, before we teach them verbs because nouns are more obvious. Do you not see that we use nouns to indicate actions and events, so that even the word 'verb' is itself a noun?

But when did languages begin to differ? If we consider the Arabic language, for example, we find that it is one language, but that the environs where it is spoken are varied: Egyptians, Sudanese, Syrians, Moroccans, Iraqis, and so on, all share a single language, but each environ has its own special dialect that the others do not understand; yet when we speak in proper Classical Arabic, the language of the Quran, we understand one another.

So the cause of the variances in language was the isolation of communities from one another, which led to the development of new languages. For example, English, French and German all go back to a single origin, which is Latin; but when communities became isolated, they each wanted their own identity in the form of a unique language with its own vocabulary and syntax.

Or, 'the diversity of your tongues' may mean the different sounds which can be made by the tongue and the other vocal instruments, like the latest announcement we have heard from linguists which states that the voice has a 'print' unique to the speaker just like in the case of fingerprints, and that this 'voice-print' is an even more accurate means of identification than fingerprints.

And so they have made safes which are programmed to recognise the voice of their owners, so that when they hear his voice they open.

What is amazing and extraordinary about sounds is that the different ways they are made are so varied; they include inanimate objects like the rustle of trees and the splash of water; and animals, like the croak of a frog, the whinny of a horse, the bray of a donkey, the bleat of a sheep, the groan of a camel,

and so on. But I ask you, by Allah: if you hear a donkey bray, can you tell whose donkey it is? No, because the voices of all creatures except mankind are uniform, having no distinction from one specimen to the next.⁽¹⁾

As for mankind, each of us has his own voice, unique in its tone, pitch, and range, or in its softness or coarseness, and so on. So why, then, are human voices distinguished in this way above all other voices?

They say it is because inanimate objects and animals do not have responsibilities that require that they each be identified and singled out, whilst humans do. Otherwise, how could we single out the one guilty of crime, if we did not know his name, or anything about him? And even if we did know how to describe him, this would not be enough to prove to us beyond any doubt that he was responsible, and so warrant his punishment.

And Allah says: ‘and (your) colours’. So tongues and colours are diverse in order that people can identify one another; and so because mankind are morally responsible, Allah created in them differences of language and colour in order that they could be used to describe a person, along with his height, and the clothes he wears, and so on.

So this is a means of regulating human behaviour, and making sure that people are upright, since they know they are unlikely to get away with any illegal action, since some of these marks of distinction are bound to give them away.

And so we find that criminal investigators spend a long time planning searches for criminals. Why is this? It is because they want to close the circle of the investigation, and discount all suspects who do not match the descriptions they have, and so they keep shortening the list of suspects until they have their man.

The True Lord *the Exalted* says: ‘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...’ (*al-Hujurat*: 13).

(1) From Proofreader: This information is according to the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Sha’rawi *may 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.

Distinction and recognition are essential for life's order. Do you not see that a man gives each of his children their own name, which identifies them; and if he likes the name Mohammad, for example, and wants to call all his children by this name, he must at least add some other name to distinguish them, so that one is Mohammad the Elder, and another is Mohammad the Younger, and another is Mohammad the Middle, and so on. Hence, identity is intrinsic for setting and determining accountability.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'in this', that is, in this wise and deliberate manner of creation, 'there are messages indeed' for us to ponder. When the Creator unifies things, this indicates His wisdom; and when He makes them diverse, this indicates His absolute power. Notice, for example, how an artisan who makes glass vessels takes the molten glass and pours it into a mould, so that they all come out the same; whilst the baker, for example makes bread from the dough, and no two loaves are exactly alike.

As for the Creator *Glorified and Exalted is He* creates with wisdom and absolute power, and He creates whatever He wills, and is not constrained by any particular mould.

The statement '...For those who are possessed of innate knowledge' means those who look into things and do not stop at the outer crust, but rather delve into the inner realities, and peel the layers to reach the real core.

Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* criticises us in one verse wondering how we often pass by His various signs in the heavens and earth and yet we remain oblivious and turn our backs (*Yusuf*: 105). So, it is not appropriate that people who possess minds should be heedless of these signs. Rather, they should reflect on them in order to gain from them that which will bring benefit to their lives, just as is the case with the modern inventions and discoveries that have served mankind, like the steam engine, the wheel, and discovering electricity, gravity, and penicillin and so on. So, we must pass by Allah's signs with our eyes open, and all the empirical sciences are the result of this.

'Those who are possessed of innate knowledge' is in Arabic '*alimun*' which is the plural of '*alim*' 'scholar' or 'scientist'. In the past days, it meant someone with knowledge of the lawful and unlawful, but now it means

much more than that. What '*alim*' actually means is anyone who has knowledge of either the cosmic sciences or Islamic sciences, and so one is a 'scientist', whilst the other is a 'scholar'. In another verse, Allah tells prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to consider how He sends water down from the sky and that He produces with it fruits of varied colours; and to see the mountains layers of white and red of various hues, and jet black; and the various colours among the human beings, wild animals, and livestock too. Then Allah concludes that it is those of His servants who have knowledge who stand in true awe of Him; for He is almighty (*Fatir*: 27-28). Here Allah *Glorified is He* mentions plants, then inanimate objects, then people, then animals, and then He declares that it is those of His servants who have knowledge who stand in true awe of Him (*Fatir*: 28). So, He did not specify what kind of people of knowledge, whether farmers, biologists, geologists, or religious scholars. Hence, the word '*alim*' encompasses all those who have knowledge about something in existence, whether science or faith.

But why did they use the word 'scholar' to refer to people fervent in Islamic laws and sciences in particular? They say it is because this was the foremost of all types of beneficial knowledge of which they were aware; and so we believe that it is part of good Islamic etiquette that the scholars of Islamic sciences should not try to theorise in secular science, and that secular scientists should not try to theorise in the religious sciences.

What caused tension between these two fields is that secular scientists, for example, said that the sun rotates around the earth, while some Islamic scholars said that this is contrary to religious teachings, even though they have never studied such things. By Allah, why are you intruding on something of which you know nothing. What difference should it make to you, as a religious scholar, whether the world is a sphere, or whether it rotates around the sun or not? What legal ruling has been added or deducted by the earth's orbit? The same thing happened when man landed on the moon; some religious scholars objected to that.

Likewise, we hear people who have no knowledge of the Islamic sciences objecting to some of it, saying that 'the mind does not accept such things.' So, the blight of any scientist is to try and involve himself in a field of which he

has no knowledge. If each were to stick to what they knew, everyone would be happy, and every field would be left to its experts.

It is strange how some Islamic scholars interpreted Allah's words about the 'spreading out' of the earth (*al-Hijr*: 19), to mean that the earth is flat! If they reflected on the meaning, they would have had no cause to object, since the meaning of 'spread out' here is that whenever you walk on its surface it spreads out ahead of you endlessly, till you return to the very same point where you started. This means that it is definitely a sphere because if it were flat or triangular it would have an end.

So, we say to all scientists – do not interfere in that of which you have no knowledge – leave the fields to their specialists. As Allah *Glorified is He* tells us, each people knew its drinking place (*al-Baqara*: 60).

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

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ مَنَامُكُمْ بِاللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَابْتِغَاؤُكُمْ مِّن فَضْلِهِ
إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَسْمَعُونَ

Among His signs are your sleep, by night and by day, and your seeking His bounty. There truly are signs in this for those who can hear [23] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 23)

Another of the wondrous signs that indicate Allah's power is 'your sleep', as now scientists have yet to discover the secret of sleep which they still do not know – despite their best efforts. Yet it exists, and it is invincible, and no one can resist it, however strong they are; and however hard they try to stay awake, sleep will surely overtake you, even if you lay on a stone slab or thorns, or even if you were standing up, or carrying something; you have to sleep, no matter what.

The philosophy of sleep is not about comprehending *how* we sleep, but *why* we sleep. They say it is because the human being is made up of many parts, each of which has its own capacity, the eye for seeing, the ear for hearing, and so on. So, when we use these parts, we reach a point where we cannot function any more, and without even realising it, instinctively, we seek rest, as if saying, 'Enough, you cannot do any more, so sleep.'

One of the wonders of sleep is that it does not come by our own volition; you might try all kinds of things to get to sleep, but sleep will not obey you; and if it comes to you, it will overcome you no matter what you are doing, and even if there is a lot of loud noise, you will fall asleep. So, an Arab once said, ‘Sleep is a phantom: if you seek it, it will torment you; and if it seeks you, it will soothe you.’

The people of insight have noticed a beautiful universal truth about sleep, connected with Allah’s word that there is not a single thing that does not celebrate His praise (*al-Isra’*: 44). Everything in existence praises Allah, even the body organs of the disbelievers, whilst it is only their free will which has disbelieved. Their limbs will remain in submission to their owner’s will until this will is taken from them on the Day of Resurrection, whereupon these limbs will bear witness against him because of the sins they forced them to endure.

We gave an example for this before of a military leader, whose troops obey him even when he is wrong because obedience is mandatory – until they come to a higher ranking officer and complain to him, and tell him what their leader did.

We also mentioned that in the Second World War, a military leader wanted to use a trick to overcome his enemy, even though it was contrary to the rules of engagement, and when his strategy worked and he defeated his enemy, they praised him for his ingenuity, but they had no choice but to punish him for breaking the rules of engagement, even though the punishment was symbolic to instil the awe of respecting rules.

Likewise, the limbs of the disbeliever obey him in this life, and will testify against him on the Day of Resurrection. Allah tells us that their tongues, hands, and feet will testify all that they did (*an-Nur*: 24). This is despite the fact that it was these same limbs which uttered words of disbelief, or stole, or did other wrong deeds, Allah made them yield to the will of their owners; but on Resurrection Day, they will have no control over their limbs; they will ask their skins: ‘...“Why did you bear witness against us?”...’ and the skins will reply, ‘...“Allah, who gives speech to all things, has given us speech too”....’ (*Fussilat*: 21)

At this point Allah will reign and ask: 'With whom does sovereignty rest today?' Surely, with Allah, the One who controls all that exists (*Ghafir*: 16).

But when the disbelievers sleep, their body parts and limbs are free of their control. They are free of their evil intentions. This is why our brethren who make the pilgrimage to Allah's House say that sleeping there is so blessed, and you only need a little to feel energised. Why is this? Because on the Pilgrimage, you are saturated with thoughts of Allah's obedience, and all your time is devoted to worship, and so your limbs are in a state of rest and tranquillity, with no sin to disturb them, so they only need a little sleep to recharge.

In view of this, we can understand Prophet Muhammad's Hadith, 'My eyes sleep, but my heart sleeps not.'⁽¹⁾ This is because his entire life was devoted to worship, so his limbs were always at peace, and a simple doze sufficed him.

The country folk here say in their dialect: 'The sleep of the wicked is an act of worship.' Why? Because as long as he is asleep, he is not commanding his limbs to do evil, or compelling them to do sin, and so they are free of him, and the people around him are free of his evil; what act of worship is greater than this?

Notice that the verse says: 'Among His signs are your sleep, by night and by day and your seeking His bounty...' (*ar-Rum*: 23). Here Allah mentions that both night and day are for sleeping or seeking His bounties. In another verse, He details them respectively saying that He has given us night and day, so that we may rest and seek His bounty and be grateful (*al-Qasas*: 73) meaning that at night we rest and at day we seek His bounties.

This rhetorical style is known in Arabic as '*Al-laff wal-nashr*' which is a compound form of metaphor and a rhetorical device similar to chiasmus. In this form of rhetoric, you mention some designated attributes in their respective order, and then you mention their collective designations, thus evoking the wit of the listener to link each attribute with its appropriate designation. An example of this is the poet's words:

My heart, my eye, my tongue, my Creator:

Content, weeping, thanking, forgiving

(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of 'A'isha Allah be pleased with her

So, the subjects are grouped together, and their descriptions grouped together afterwards; the former is termed ‘involution’, and the latter ‘evolution’.

These two verses have caused the scholars to pause since it is not possible to comment on one without considering the other, and we should not attempt to understand each verse in isolation. Notice that in this verse: ‘Among His signs are your sleep, by night and by day, and your seeking His bounty...’ (*ar-Rum*: 23), Allah makes both night and day times of sleep, and times of work.

In the other verse, we mentioned above (*al-Qasas*: 73), this is a universal sign, as night is a time of sleep, stillness and rest, while day is a time of work, and activity; yet, there is nothing to prevent us from working at night, too. Indeed some jobs are only done at night, like night watchmen, security guards, police, bakers, and such. The time of rest for these people is during the day; and with this understanding, the two similar verses complement one another.

So, Allah’s word ‘...and your seeking His bounty...’ (*ar-Rum*: 23) means that the seeking of one’s livelihood can be done at both day and night, although the majority work at day and sleep at night, and the minority do the opposite.

You might say that this is true for us, where night and day are almost equal, but what about the places where night can last three months, as can the day? If we understand the verse in this way, does that mean they work three months and then sleep three months? Or, do they break the long night into days and nights, and the long day into days and nights as well? They can surely do so, since mankind are able to rest at night and work at day, or the opposite, since both day and night are times for work and rest.

The True Lord tells us of the blessing He gave us by making day follow night, asking prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ponder; what if Allah were to cast perpetual night over us until the Day of Resurrection, what God other than He could bring us light? And if He were to cast perpetual day over us until the Day of Resurrection, what God other than He could give you night in which to rest? (*al-Qasas*: 71-72) This verse ends with an exclamatory phrase urging us to ‘see’ and think. But why ‘see’? This is because day is a time of seeing and watching, while at night our vision is limited, so it is more related to hearing; and the ear is the tool that serves its purpose at night, when our sight is limited.

Elsewhere, in the Quran Allah says that it is He Who made the night and day follow each other – so anyone who wishes may be mindful or show gratitude (*al-Furqan*: 62).

So, night follows day, and day follows night; this is true of this life which we live now, but when creation first began, which of them came first, and which followed? If you say that the night came first, this means that the day is its successor, but in this case the night is not a successor; yet the aforementioned text states that each of them succeeds the other, so how can we explain this? The answer to this comes by considering the spherical shape of the earth. If Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* said this to the people at the start of his mission, no one would have believed him; how could they, when there are still those who deny this even today?

But the True Lord would not leave such an important fact of nature without at least alluding to it subtly, so that when knowledge progressed people would recognise it. If the earth was flat, and Allah has created the sun facing the earth, day would have been the first ever incident to happen; hence, it would not have been possible to say that day followed the night. But since the Creator *Glorified and Exalted is He* has informed us that night and day both follow each other, then He must have created the earth in such a way that both night and day existed at the very same time, and so when the universe went into motion, day and night followed each other. This could only be the case if the earth were spherical, and the part of it facing the sun was at 'day', while the part facing away from it was at 'night'.

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse that neither may the sun outrun the moon, nor the moon outrun the sun, since all the celestial objects orbit through space (*Ya Sin*: 40).

In this last verse, why does the True Lord *Glorified is He*; negate the ability of the night to precede the day? It is said that because at that time, people believed that night was the very first incident at the start of creation. Till this day, we even consider *Ramadan* (for instance) to start on the eve (night) that precedes its first day. This means that they did not think that day preceded the very first night at the start of creation. So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* negates their perception saying that the night cannot outrun the day (*Ya Sin*: 40). He

affirmed what they believed about the day not outrunning night, but negated the ability of night to outrun the day. So, neither night nor day can outrun the other, which could only be the case if they existed at one and the same time; the part facing the sun would be ‘day’, and the part facing away from it would be ‘night’.

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

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ يُرِيكُمْ الْبَرْقَ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا وَيُنَزِّلُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَيُخْرِجُ بِهِ الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

Among His signs, too, are that He shows you the lightning that terrifies and inspires hope; that He sends water down from the sky to restore the earth to life after death. There truly are signs in this for those who use their reason [24]

(The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 24)

Sometimes, Allah *Glorified is He* ends the verses addressing people who think, other times addressing people who possess knowledge, or people willing to listen, or people using their reasoning. So, different instruments of perception are mentioned.

Some think that reason is a tool which is utilised for everything since reason is the means by which we accept something or reject perceptions. In reality, however, you only use reason in religious matters a single time, which then relieves you of the need to use it again. You use your reasoning to decide whether you will believe or not, and if your reason guides you to the realisation that this universe has an All-Powerful and Wise Creator, and that this Deity is only One, you will gain conviction in this matter and the thought would rarely bother you again, nor will your intellect revisit it. After this, in respect to subsequent branches of faith, you approach them according to the primary issue of faith, and so you need not recourse to reason.

So, the wise ones say that reason is like a vehicle that takes you to the court of the king, but does not enter with you. Likewise, reason takes you as far as belief, and then its role ends. So, if you hear that Allah has said something, you are convinced of the truth of what He says without needing to use your reason.

So, when Allah *Glorified is He* refers to people who 'use their reason', or 'think', or 'know', and when He calls you to reflect and take admonition, He is only alerting the instruments of argument within you to confirm it; the role of reason here is to consider the alternatives, the premises and conclusions.

For example, if you go to the fabric merchant, he shows you his fabrics; pure wool or pure cotton, and he also shows you the excellence of his handiwork, bringing a thread of the wool and a thread of the cotton to fire so you can see how the wool does not catch fire while the cotton does.

He provokes your critical thinking, so you can be sure of the quality of his merchandise. As for the one who is not sure of his talent, he resorts to using tricks and ruses to fool his customers into buying.

The Creator *Glorified is He* encourages us to reflect and ponder His signs, saying to us, 'Reflect, ponder, and reason; be aware of what goes on around you.' This shows us that if we were to look into these signs, we would arrive at His true intent, which is believing.

Lightning is a natural phenomenon, and when we hear the resounding explosion we call it thunder. Thunder happens moments after seeing the bright flash in the sky: lightning. It is one of the electric reactions that occur in the sky as modern science has come to understand, but before this, when people saw lightning they thought it to be one of two things; either it had come to strike them with fire, or rain would fall upon them, and so they would fear the thunderbolts and hope for the rain. 'Among His signs, too, are that He shows you the lightning that terrifies and inspires hope; that He sends water down from the sky...' (*ar-Rum*: 24) so that we remain in this middle ground between fear and hope.

But do all people hope for rain? Imagine you are a traveller, or that you are in the countryside with no shelter to protect you from the rain. A person without shelter would not hope for rain nor wait for it, and so out of His mercy, Allah gives precedence for restoring the life of the earth after its death: '...He sends water down from the sky to restore the earth to life after death...' (*ar-Rum*: 24).

The word 'sky' in Arabic *sama'* has two meanings; its primary meaning is the seven heavens above us, and its secondary lexical meaning is everything

above our heads, which is the meaning meant here by: ‘...He sends water down from the sky...’ (*ar-Rum*: 24) since rain actually comes from the clouds; so ‘sky’ here means that which is above us.

If you reflect on the rain that falls from the sky, you will see that it comes from built-up clouds. Allah tells us to see how He drives the clouds, then gathers them together and piles them up until we see rain pouring from their midst (*an-Nur*: 43).

We have already spoken about how clouds are formed, and how they are the result of water vapour because out of His wisdom Allah covered three quarters of the earth with water and made the other quarter dry land, so the area which produces water vapour would be vaster; and hence three quarters of the earth serves the remaining quarter, to ensure enough rain to suffice all who live on earth.

We also explained the importance of a large surface area of water for the evaporation process, and said that if you leave a cup of water on the window ledge it will stay as it is for a long time because only a small amount can evaporate, whereas if you pour the water on the floor, it will dry in a matter of minutes because the surface area becomes bigger, in the latter case, and so it evaporates more quickly.

We also compared the process of cloud formation to the distillation we do at laboratories in order to produce clean, pure water. This is done by boiling the water until it turns into steam, which then rises to a cold surface where it condenses in the form of pure water. So, when you receive rainwater, you are receiving distilled water of utmost purity, without pondering much about what has taken place, and without having to do anything.

Reflect on the amazing natural engineering of rain production. The sun heats the earth’s surface and causing water to evaporate, and rise to high altitudes where the temperature is low, so the water condenses and clouds are formed. It is amazing that every time we rise 30 metres, the temperature decreases by a degree, even though we are getting closer to the sun. This is because the sun does not heat up the atmosphere, it only heats the surface of the earth, which in turn conducts heat, so the further we go up from the earth, the colder it gets.

Out of His wisdom, Allah made much of the water of the earth, from which fresh water evaporates, salty, because salt prevents it from becoming stagnant, or changing its odour, and prevents harmful parasites from growing in it; and so it remains intact, to replenish the fresh water that irrigates the earth.

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

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ تَقُومَ السَّمَاءُ وَالْأَرْضُ بِأَمْرِهِ ثُمَّ إِذَا
دَعَاكُمْ دَعْوَةً مِّنَ الْأَرْضِ إِذَا أَنتُمْ تَخْرُجُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

Among His signs, too, is the fact that the heavens and the earth stand firm by His command. In the end, you will all emerge when He calls you from the earth [25]
(The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 25)

Here, 'heavens' means the seven heavens, which stand without any pillars. We said that if something is above you, it must either be supported from below or held up from above, like a suspension bridge. Likewise, the sky is a raised ceiling which has no pillars we can see. This means it must be held up another way, and Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that He is the One holding the celestial bodies so they may not fall upon the earth (*al-Hajj*: 65).

'Among His signs, too, is the fact that the heavens and the earth stand firm by His command...' (*ar-Rum*: 25). This balance is never disturbed, and we see no cracks in it because it is constructed with precision. Look at the sky when it is free of clouds, and you will find that it is smooth and uniform throughout its entire expanse. Can any painter paint for us an expanse that big in a single consistent colour?

If you understand 'heavens' here to mean everything that is above us, then consider the sun, the moon, the stars and planets, and how at the behest of Allah they all maintain a precise order which never shifts, so we never see two planets colliding, for instance, or anything exiting its fixed orbit. Allah *Glorified is He* tells us they all orbit in space (*al-Anbiya*': 33) each at its own speed, its own orbit and its own precise balance. This is because they are all held up at Allah's behest, and His omnipotent power and they each perform their purpose exactly without any deviation or error.

The meaning of ‘stand firm’ here is that they remain as they are without any disruption; it is a present tense verb implying continuity. Reflect on this: before man created the telescope, we saw nothing of the solar system but the sun, and when the telescope was created we were able to see the other planets that revolve around it.

It is amazing that their orbits are not perfectly circular but elliptical – wider at one side and narrower at the other. These planets all orbit the sun, and revolve around their own axes at the same time. The earth, for example, orbits the sun, which gives rise to the four seasons, and it revolves around its axis, giving rise to night and day. These calculated movements are the result of a precise system of absolute order.

These planets differ in their proximity to the sun, the nearest being Mercury, then Venus, then Earth, then Mars, then Jupiter, then Saturn, then Uranus, then Neptune, then furthest away from the sun is Pluto.⁽¹⁾ They each have their own orbit around the sun, and so each lap around the sun is termed a ‘year’, while each rotation around their own axis is termed a ‘day’.

It is amazing that a single day for Venus, the second planet from the sun, is equivalent to 244 days for Earth, whilst a single year for Venus is equivalent to 225 days for Earth – so the year is shorter than the day. This is because its orbit around the sun is one thing and revolving around its own axis is another. In this case it orbits the sun quickly, but revolves on its own axis slowly.

If you knew that in Allah’s vast universe there are a million solar systems like ours just in our galaxy: the Milky Way. This is just in the galaxy we know – if we pondered this we will be able to appreciate the magnificence of this universe, of which we only know a little. So, when you read Allah’s word that it is He who has built the universe and it is He who is steadily expanding it (*adh-Dharyyat*: 47), you realise that these things are only infinite according to our knowledge and minds – but for Allah, they are indeed finite.

(1) From Proofreader: This information is according to the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Sh’arawi *may 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.

Nothing more clearly illustrates the precise order of celestial movements than the way it is possible to exactly predict the solar and lunar eclipses, which are projected by scientists and then occur at the exact moment predicted. They base their calculations on the movement of the planets and their orbits, and so we say to those who are still obstinate enough to deny that the earth is moving: You must be thinking that the scientists who predict eclipses possess knowledge of the unseen! But wouldn't it be better to admit that it is indeed Allah, who created them in this precise order; thus attributing it to Allah, rather than to the scientists?

Then, He says: '...In the end, you will all emerge when He calls you from the earth...' (*ar-Rum*: 25). This is about the second blast of the trumpet. The first blast is the one Allah *Glorified is He* describes as being one single blast after which we will all fall down lifeless (*Ya Sin*: 29). This will be followed by the second blast which Allah describes as the one single blast which will bring us all aligned before him (*Ya Sin*: 53).

The first blast will cause everything to die, and the second will cause everything to be resurrected; and if you consider these two blasts, and the secret Allah has placed within them, you will be amazed to find that it corresponds to the secret of life.

In every moment of our time, births and deaths are taking place. We have widely varying dates of birth and death, but in the hereafter we will all be the same; even though we might have different birth dates we will all be resurrected on the very same day, to be aligned in front of Allah (*Ya Sin*: 53). Also, those who died on different days will all fall down lifeless on the same day (*Ya Sin*: 29). This means that birth corresponds to resurrection and death corresponds to falling down lifeless. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says that He will gather us all on the Day of Gathering (*at-Taghabun*: 9).

The second blast will be made by the Angel Israfil upon Allah's Command because the True Lord does some things Himself, and we all know that He created man with His own hand, and then said to Satan (Iblis): '...“What has kept you from prostrating yourself before that which I created with My Hands?”...' (*Sad*: 75). Otherwise, Allah delegates to His creatures all the affairs of the cosmos.

At one instance Allah tells us that it is He who causes all human beings to die at their appointed time (*az-Zumar*: 42). At another instance, He tells us that the one who reclaims us is the angel of death who has been put in charge of us (*As-Sajda*: 11). Also, at another instance the task is delegated to the ‘messengers’ who cause our death (*al-An‘am*: 61); the helper-angels, who are the hosts of the Angel of Death. So, Allah first ascribed death to Himself because He is the One Who has command over it, and who issues orders to the Angel of Death; and in his turn, the Angel of Death commands his hosts; so, all goes back to Allah.

When Allah tells us that we will ‘emerge’, this means that the dead will all come back to life when they hear this blast. This implies abruptness and shock – and this is the difference between the birth of this world and the birth of the Hereafter. The birth of this world is not a surprise, but rather comes after a period of expectation; before a woman gives birth, we see the signs of her pregnancy for several months, and she endures for several months; so there is no surprise.

وَلَهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ كُلُّ لَهُ قَانُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

**Everyone in the heavens and earth belongs to Him,
and all are obedient to Him [26] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 26)**

Since ‘everyone’ means intelligent life, we might ask why He chose to specify this when everything in the universe serves Allah, obeys Him, glorifies Him and is in devout obedience before Him. They say it is because insubordination can only be the outcome of a thinking mind. As for inanimate objects with no intelligence, their case is simple since they are not capable of disobeying Allah in any way – elements, plants, animals and so on.

Consider a donkey used in carrying garbage. If you elevate its status by using it for a mount instead, it will not protest; it did not disobey in the first place, and it will not disobey in the second place because it is subjugated for you by Allah’s will not because of your intelligence or power. Allah tells us to look how He created for us things made by His hands, and created livestock we control, and made them obedient, so that some can be used for riding, and some for food (*Ya Sin*: 71-72).

Look at the camel; since Allah subdued it for us, even a small child can steer it and make it kneel, and ride on it and load it; whilst a small snake would frighten you despite its small size because Allah did not subdue it for you.

We should pause for a moment to consider His word: ‘...Everyone in the heavens and earth...’ (*ar-Rum*: 26). Those in the heavens are indeed in devout submission to Allah, serving Him and obeying His will; these are the blessed angels who never disobey Allah in whatever He commands them, but they always do what they are bidden (*at-Tahrim*: 6). They also extol His limitless Glory by night and day without ever tiring (*al-Anbiya*: 20).

But what about the human beings, where some of whom are atheists and disbelievers who do not devoutly obey? How, then can we understand ‘all are obedient to Him’? They say that when these people defied Allah by disbelieving, or defied His Laws by disobeying Him, their innate selves never participated in this defiance, but rather, they did so with the free will that Allah created for them. Had Allah wanted to compel them, none of them would have ever strayed from His will; but Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* does not want to compel mankind by force. He rather wants His servants to come to Him freely and willingly, with the option to disbelieve and yet choosing to believe, and with the option to disobey yet choosing to obey.

If Allah wanted to force them to believe, they would have found no way to disbelieve, and He would have made them infallible like the Prophets. Your Lord wants your faith to be an outcome of love and sincerity, not compulsion and force; and so Satan (Iblis) swore by Allah’s Might that he will beguile us into grievous error, except for the ones who are true servants of Allah (*Sad*: 82-83).

So, he has no power over Allah’s sincere servants, whom Allah has chosen for himself, and he cannot influence them. So, Satan (Iblis) is not in a battle with his Lord, but rather, his battle is with mankind. Elsewhere, Allah *Glorified is He* tells him that he shall have no power over His true servants (*al-Hijr*: 42).

When the insubordinate choose to defy Allah, and they reconcile with it, Allah gives them more of it and aids them to it. Allah does not benefit from

those who obey Him, nor is He harmed by those who disobey Him. So, He seals their hearts till faith cannot enter, and disbelief cannot exit. He has no need for any of His creatures, and so when He created paradise; He made it vast enough for all mankind to enter if they believed, and when He created Hell, He made it vast enough for all mankind to enter if they disbelieved, and He left it up to them; he who wants to believe can believe and he who wants to disbelieve can disbelieve (*al-Kahf*: 29).

It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* were saying to us, ‘You are free, and I am ready to reward you all, for My Paradise is vast enough for you all, if you all believe; and Hell is not too small to take you all if you disbelieve.’

We say to those who defy Allah – you should be logical with yourself, and defy everything without being selective; so when sickness comes to you, defy it, and when death comes, defy it. If you cannot, then you are under the power of Allah, and subservient to Him: ‘...all are obedient to Him...’ (*ar-Rum*: 26). All things submit to Him either willingly or compulsively in all matters over which they have no free will. So, you are submissive despite yourself, and your submission paired with your defiance is the clearest argument supporting the presence of Allah.

So, the believer submits to Allah within the area of free will, and this area covers belief and moral responsibilities. He also submits to Allah in those things which he cannot control, like fate, and compulsory acts, and he accepts them happily. As for the disbeliever, he also submits to Allah, and cannot break away from His decree or His will no matter how hard he tries in those things in which he has no free will; yet he receives them with the bitterness and dissatisfaction of a disbeliever in Allah, and a hater of His decree.

So, we say to those who try to defy Allah and disbelieve in Him, or His Law – why do you not defy Allah in the involuntary acts He compels you to do? In fact, you did not choose correctly because you have to choose all or none.

وَهُوَ الَّذِي يَبْدَأُ الْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُهُ وَهُوَ أَهْوَنُ عَلَيْهِ وَلَهُ
 الْمَثَلُ الْأَعْلَىٰ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٢٧﴾

**He is the One who originates creation and will do it again –
 this is even easier for Him. He is above all comparison in the
 heavens and earth; He is the Almighty, the All Wise [27]
 (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 27)**

The Quran frequently mentions this matter to us, reminding us of the first creation and its subsequent recurrence. The Quran is concerned with this issue, and emphasising it, because it is the hinge of the Quranic message; if people believe that they will return to Allah, they will fear His punishment, and so Allah emphasises to them in numerous places the certitude of their return, and the absolute truth of it.

He says: ‘He is the One Who originates creation and will do it again...’ (*ar-Rum*: 27). The verse begins with the word ‘He is’, whilst in an earlier verse He says, ‘Allah is the One Who originates creation and will do it again...’ (*ar-Rum*: 11) So, the word ‘He’ here refers to Allah. As we know, it is a third person pronoun, called in Arabic *ghayb* which literally means ‘unseen’. The True Lord *Glorified is He* is unseen to the eye, and this is an aspect of His greatness, if He were to be perceived by the usual senses, He would not be a Deity; and how could we hope to perceive Him when we cannot even perceive many of His creations?

Allah has created certain concepts to govern life, concepts like ‘truth’ and ‘justice’; ‘truth’ is what the whole judiciary supports and proclaims, and ‘justice’ is what governs the criteria of life, to establish balance between whims and facts. These concepts cannot be perceived by the senses; have you ever seen justice, or heard it, or smelled it? The high concepts cannot be encompassed by the senses because they are higher than the senses, and it is only through them that anything can be perceived. In this case can some of the creations of Allah be too lofty to be perceived by the senses, whilst He Himself could be perceived?

So, when you hear the word ‘He’, know that it only applies to the One Allah, who because of His greatness cannot be perceived by the senses. Allah

tells us that no human vision can encompass Him, while He encompasses all human vision (*al-An'am*: 103). That is why we read in the chapter of *al-Ikhlās*: 'He is the One Allah' (*al-Ikhlās*: 1). We see that the word 'Allah', the Divine Name signifying the One Whose existence is necessary (The Necessary Existent), coming after the word 'He', emphasising that the word 'He' is more of an indicator of the Divine Presence than the Divine Name 'Allah'. As if the pronoun 'He' is not rightfully ascribed to anyone except Allah since nothing necessarily exists except Him.

Allah's words: 'He is the One Who originates creation...' (*ar-Rum*: 27) here are in the present tense, indicating continuity. Somewhere else Allah tells us that He first created us (used here in the past tense), so we will come back [to life] again (*al-A'raf*: 29). Hence, Allah began the creation, and it became a continuously renewed creation. He also starts and continues creation in every moment we see something new created. Creation did not come all at once and then it stopped; it rather began and then continued. So, we notice that the Quran sometimes mentions this in the past tense, and sometimes in the present; for indeed the True Lord *Glorified is He* began creation by creating Adam *peace be upon him* the first man, and He excelled in creating everything He creates, and began the creation of man out of clay (*as-Sajda*: 7).

By His All-Sustaining nature, He remains a Creator, every day and every moment bringing a new creation into existence, as we see in the case of men, animals, plants and so on.

By the constant renewed creation of mankind, and how every moment a new child is born, we refute the argument of those who believe in reincarnation; those who think that when souls leave the body at death they are reborn in new bodies. This would mean that the rate of births and deaths would have to be equal, and that the world census would have to stay fixed; yet we all witness the overpopulation that the world complains of today, and this is enough to invalidate this theory.

The True Lord warns us not to take the story of the first creation from anyone but the Creator, for there are many people who misguide others about this matter; so do not listen to them. Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that He did not make them witness the creation of the heavens and earth nor the creation

of their own selves; neither did He take as His helpers those who lead men astray (*al-Kahf*: 51).

We have all seen that some of these misguiding people say that the origin of mankind was the apes, and then they evolved into humans. The answer to these delusions is simple: if apes evolved into humans, then why did the rest of the apes not evolve as well? Why has mankind, since Adam *peace be upon him* was created, not evolved into something else? How can we believe these delusions, when our Lord says that He created pairs from all things so that people might take note? (*adh-Dhariyat*: 49) He also says that He created pairs of all things which the earth produces, from our own selves and from that of which we have no knowledge (*Ya Sin*: 36).

So, beware of saying that something has evolved from something else; for every species has been what it is since Allah created it. Beware of these ideas, and do not take the story of the first creation from anyone but Allah Himself.

The phrase 'brings it forth anew' (*ar-Rum*: 11) means that He recreates it; so the meaning is: He creates things for the first time, then causes death, then revives. Some people think that 'brings it forth anew' refers to the resurrection in the Hereafter, but Allah *Glorified is He* says that He first brought creation into being and in the end He will reproduce it (*ar-Rum*: 11). This means that 'bringing creation into being' is distinct from 'reproducing it'; it is the Resurrection.

He says: 'this is even easier for Him' (*ar-Rum*: 27), that is, according to your human perception of things, otherwise it cannot be said that things are easy or easier for Allah, or simple and simpler, since Allah does not deal with things as we do, and His actions do not require any effort; rather, He simply says 'Be!' and it is.

An example of this is what He said to Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* when he expressed amazement at the notion that he might be given a son despite his old age and his wife's infertility. But Allah revealed to him that this is easy for Him (*Maryam*: 9) because Allah's absolute power is not limited by our human concepts. Likewise, He said to Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* that it is easy for Him (*Maryam*: 21).

So, it was incredible in Maryam's (Mary's) eyes that she should conceive a child without any husband, but it was not incredible in view of Allah's Omnipotent Power. Although the usual thing is that a child is born through specific means, yet Allah is the Creator of these means, and He is free to do as He wills without utilising any of them.

We spoke before about the manifestation of Allah's Omnipotent Power in the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when his people wanted to burn him. If it was merely a matter of saving Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* from the fire, Allah would not have allowed them to get hold of him in the first place; or even if they had caught him and thrown him in the fire, Allah could have sent down rain to extinguish it.

But the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to silence all the arguments of the disbelievers, and show the falsehood of their disbelief, and so they caught Ibrahim (Abraham) and threw him into the fire as it blazed and burned; yet they forgot something important. Allah is the Lord of that fire and its Creator, and the Creator of its power to burn, and He alone is able to take from it this power so that His Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* could be cast into it without getting burnt. So, His greatness was manifested, and His proof was made plain, and He said to the fire to be cold and peaceful for Ibrahim (Abraham) (*al-Anbiya':* 69).

Notice the eloquence of Allah's words: 'He is the One Who originates creation...' (*ar-Rum:* 27). The rhetorical style here is one of restriction since information which could have been left to the end of the phrase is mentioned at the beginning. This is similar to Allah's words: 'You alone do we worship...' (*al-Fatiha:* 5).

In this case, the object is brought to the beginning, although objects are usually mentioned after their subject and verb. It is brought forward here in order to restrict our declaration of worship to Allah alone, and no other, so that we could not add anything else to Allah. So, if we said, 'We worship You', we could add to this, 'and we worship you and others.' The same is the case with 'He is the One Who originates...' (*ar-Rum:* 27) which affirms that creation is solely the work of Allah, without our being able to add any other.

He says 'this is even easier for Him' (*ar-Rum: 27*) although in reality there is no question of easy and easier where Allah is concerned, hence the True Lord *Glorified is He* is saying so to help us understand that He does not act in the way that we act, rather, He simply says 'Be!' and it is.

Reflect on the statement of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* when the angels gave her the news of the birth of Al-Masih (the Messiah), and she asked how she could have a son when no man has ever touched her! (*Al-'Imran: 47*) How did Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* come to understand this, and who told her that she would conceive a child without any human touching her? She understood this when the angel told her that Allah is sending her the glad tidings of a word from Him, who shall become known as Al-Masih 'Isa (Jesus) son of Maryam (Mary) (*Al-'Imran: 45*).

If the child were to have a father, the angels would have mentioned his name (would have called him 'son of so-and-so'), yet since they named him after his mother, this showed he was to have no father.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'He is above all comparison in the heavens and earth...' (*ar-Rum: 27*). This means that Allah is beyond comparison, and so if any of His creatures seem to resemble Him in any of His attributes, then we have to perceive it in view of: 'He is above all comparison in the heavens and earth...'. You have existence, and Allah has existence, but your existence is not like Allah's; you have life, and Allah has life, but your life is not like Allah's, and so on.

Concerning the phrase: 'He is the Almighty, the All Wise' (*ar-Rum: 27*), the word 'almighty' in Arabic *a'la* is the superlative form of '*ali* which means 'high', meaning something that cannot be compared or likened to anything else; and this is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...He is above all comparison...' (*ash-Shura: 11*). This negates not only that there could be anything like Allah, but that there could be anything like a likeness of Him because the two Arabic words *ka* and *mithl*, which both mean 'the like of', are used together, so literally it says 'there is nothing like His likeness.'

The way the Arabs draw comparisons would be to say, for example 'Zayd is as brave as a lion.' You want to give us an impression of *Zayd's* courage,

so you use the clearest example to this attribute which is the lion. Hence, the lion actually possesses more of this attribute – of bravery – than *Zayd*, otherwise you would not have used it as the basis of your comparison.

So, when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...He is above all comparison...’ (*ash-Shura*: 11), this means that even if there were a likeness to Allah, there could be no likeness for this likeness. This constitutes an a priori negation of any likeness to Him because the weaker element, which is the object of the comparison (*Zayd*), has to be lesser than the object used to compare it with (the lion). If it were the other way round (like saying that the lion is braver than *Zayd*), there would be absolutely no point from this comparison.

Look at how beautifully the True Lord *Glorified is He* gives His creatures examples from their own world, and draws the analogy from His own Being. In order to help us understand the reality of His Light, He tells us that He is the Light of the heavens and earth. His Light is like a niche, and in it is a lamp, the lamp is inside a glass, and the glass is like a glittering star, fuelled from a blessed olive tree from neither east nor west, and its oil almost gives light even when no fire touches it; light upon light and Allah guides whoever He wills to his Light and He draws such comparisons for people; and He has full knowledge of everything (*an-Nur*: 35).

So, He compares His Light to that of a niche (*mishkat*) which people superficially mistake as meaning a lamp, but Allah says it is ‘a niche and in it is a lamp’ (*an-Nur*: 35). A niche is like an alcove in the wall, and inside it they used to place lamps to light up the room. This niche would gather the light from the lamp and reflect it so that the light inside the niche would be brighter than it is in the rest of the room.

If we reflect on this notion, we will see that the True Lord *Glorified is He* is not giving us a simile of His Light, but rather of His Illumination, so Allah’s Illumination is like that of a niche wherein there is a lamp, and the lamp indicates a more modern way of lighting. Beneath the lamp comes the candle, which is a wick on which a naked flame burns, and it emits black smoke. As for a lamp, its flame is encased in glass which only provides it with enough air for the flame to stay lit without burning off the wick, so the light that comes from it is pure.

Moreover, this light is not in any ordinary glass, but rather in one 'like a glittering star' (*an-Nur*: 35) which is producing its own light. This lamp is lit from an olive tree which is perfectly balanced, 'from neither east nor west'. Imagine such a lamp in a small space, not simply hung in the centre of the room, but rather in a niche; how bright would its light be?

This is the nature of Allah's illumination of the heavens and the earth. Despite their vast size, Allah's light bathes them in their entirety, just like the niche into which this lamp we are discussing is placed.

This parable has a famous story attached to it from the chronicles of Arabic literature. It occurred to the poet Abu Tammam⁽¹⁾ when he was praising one of the caliphs and wanted to convey that he combined all of the virtues and gifts of the Arab people such as generosity, bravery, forbearance, and intelligence, saying,

'Amr's bravery with Hatim's largess,

Ahnaf's patience with Iyas' cunningness.

'Amr ibn Mu'adda Kurb was famous for his bravery, Hatim At-Ta'i for his generosity, Ahnaf ibn Qays for his forbearance – he was known as the 'mildest of the Arabs', never becoming angry or losing his patience. Once a group of people⁽²⁾ attempted to make him lose his patience, to win a wager of being the first to do so. They followed him in the street and ridiculed him, whilst all the time he smiled until they reached his neighbourhood, whereupon he looked to them and said, 'My fellows, we are close to home, so if you have any more insults for me, now is the time; for if my folks catch you, they will kill you.'

As for Iyas ibn Mu'awiya, he had exemplary intelligence. In his praise of the caliph, Abu Tammam ascribed to him all the virtues that Arabs valued. Upon this, one of his rivals said, 'Do you compare the caliph to such inferiors? Who were those men next to the caliph?' The following famous verses express this criticism:

(1) The story of Abu Tammam writing panegyrics to Ahmad Ibn Al-Mu'tasim and those who envied him out of spite

(2) The story of the youth who were testing the patience of Ahnaf and his response to them

His praising poet compares his magnificence
To those who are like his feeblest servants:
In his army are countless superiors of Antar
And among his servants a thousand Hatim!
Faced with this criticism, Abu Tammam paused a little then said:
Do not censure me for comparing him to inferiors,
Such examples of valour and munificence,
For Allah Almighty gives an example of His Light
By a niche in which a lamp is shining bright!

Even though his reply appeared spontaneous, his rivals saw that it was too prompt to have been composed on the spot. They accused Abu Tammam of having prepared these lines earlier, and some of the scholars of literature hold this view. It is reported, however, that when the paper Abu Tammam had with him was inspected, the aforesaid verse were not found there. Anyway, even if he did prepare them earlier, this also bears testimony to his brilliance, for he was clever enough to expect their criticism and prepare his reply to it.

Allah then says: ‘... He is above all comparison in the heavens and earth...’ (*ar-Rum*: 27). Allah is the Highest Example on earth, for nothing is like Him. Likewise, He is the Highest Example in the heavens, for nothing there is like Him either. Even though the dwellers of the heavens; namely, the angels, are unknown to us, we know that they have their own attributes and they are nothing like the Attributes of Allah. He is beyond all comparison in the heavens and earth.

Allah concludes the verse by saying: ‘... He is the Almighty, the All Wise’ (*ar-Rum*: 27). Allah has absolute Power over all things, yet He also has absolute Wisdom by which He applies His Power, so He does not wrong anyone.

Allah says in the following verse:

ضَرَبَ لَكُمْ مَثَلًا مِّنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ هَلْ لَّكُمْ مِّنْ مَّا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ مِّنْ
شُرَكَاءَ فِي مَآ رَزَقْنَكُمْ فَآنتُمْ فِيهِ سَوَاءٌ تَخَافُونَهُمْ كَخِيفَتِكُمْ
أَنْفُسَكُمْ كَذَلِكَ نُفَصِّلُ الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

He gives you this example, drawn from your own lives: do you make your slaves full partners with an equal share in what We have given you? Do you fear them as you fear each other? This is how We make Our messages clear to those who use their reason [28] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 28)

Drawing parables is one of the ways used in the Quran to explain the matters pertaining to faith and make them easier to comprehend. In another verse of the Quran, Allah says: ‘Allah does not disdain to propound a parable of a gnat, or of something [even] less than that...’ (*al-Baqara*: 26). He also says: ‘O people! A parable is set forth, therefore listen to it...’ (*al-Hajj*: 73). Using parables to clarify truths is quite frequent in the Quran.

The Arabic verb often used to mean ‘give (an example)’ or ‘draw (a parable)’ is *daraba* which also means ‘strike’ or ‘hit’. These meanings seem to have nothing in common. However, they both denote ‘making a profound effect’. Allah says, for example: ‘... some of you *yadrebun* through the land seeking Allah’s bounty...’ (*al-Muzzammil*: 20). This is a present form of the verb *daraba* which here denotes ‘traveling through the land, making a change in it and seeking livelihood’. This verb is also used to describe the minting of coins. So it is as though the meaning of this verb is to leave a lasting mark on something. People *yadrebun* through the earth means searching it, unveiling its treasures, and employing its resources. As for coins, *darb* is done by leaving a mark on it that cannot be erased when the coins are taken from one hand to another; so is the case with *darb* (drawing; propounding) parables and examples. They serve to explain matters so that they become clearly ingrained in the mind.

This takes us to proverbs. These too are used for expressing or underlining facts or notions. A man once went hunting; the moment he saw a good catch, he started preparing his tools to hunt it, yet the animal would not wait for him to be ready, hence the proverb, ‘Before shooting, fill your quiver!’ It is no longer confined to the particular occasion of hunting, but the saying now goes

for any situation where one fails to be ready for something. It can be said, for example to a student who waits until just before his exam to cram information. Another example is, 'If you are wind, you have just met a tornado!' This would be said by someone who wants to threaten or deter a tough opponent.

So Allah gives us parables to explain things to us so we understand them. Therefore, He says: 'Allah does not disdain to propound a parable of a gnat or of something [even] less than that...' (*al-Baqara*: 26). The Arabic structure of this verse has been subject to little debate among exegetes. It literally translates:... of a gnat or of anything above that...'. Some argue that so long as Allah does not disdain to draw a parable of a gnat, it necessarily entails that He would not disdain to draw a parable of anything above that. However, they do not know that the verse actually means: '... of a gnat or anything above that [*in littleness*]...', so the verse means anything even smaller or more insignificant, not anything larger, than a gnat.

This is another parable through which Allah explains the concept of His Oneness: 'Allah puts forward this illustration: can a man who has for his masters several partners at odds with each other be considered equal to a man devoted wholly to one master? All praise belongs to Allah, though most of them do not know' (*az-Zumar*: 29). So those who take other gods beside Allah are like a servant who serves several masters who disagree with one another, so if he pleased one, he would displease the other. What a wretched position between them all! Is such a servant equal to another who serves one master? So is the case of worshipping Allah alone with no partners. Thus, Allah does not shy away or disdain from drawing parables to explain the truth of things to His servants.

Back to the verse we are reflecting on, it presents a parable through which Allah explains the concept of monotheism. This verse emphasises the Oneness and Unity of Allah. He is One, for there is no God but Him, and He is One also in the sense that He is not made up of parts.

Allah says: 'He gives you this example, drawn from your own lives...' that is, a real example, not far from you. The clearest illustration of something we cannot see is through something with which we are familiar. People learn what they do not know through what they know. This is also why Allah has

sent us human Messengers, not angels, for example; He says: 'A Messenger has come to you from among yourselves...' (*at-Tawba*: 128). That is, from your own kind, so you know his character and history.

Now, what is the parable we are examining? Allah says: '... do you make your slaves full partners with an equal share in what We have given you? Do you fear them as you fear each other?...' (*ar-Rum*: 28) This parable illustrates that it is an intellectual necessity that no partners be ascribed to the One God. Allah provides for His servants and showers His blessings on them. He makes some of them servants and bondsmen to others. Would you allow your servants to be your partners and share control of everything you possess? Would you give them absolute control and freedom as if they were freemen like you? Would you fear that they might outdo you, just as you fear your equals? Have you ever done this? Would you accept such a thing for yourselves? Then why do you accept such a thing for Allah? Why do you ascribe to His servants a share of His sovereignty? You would not accept your servants to be your equals, even though they are human beings like you, so judge by your own standards. They are Adam's progeny just like you, and your ownership of them is not absolute. You confine their freedom, but you do not own their souls, hearts, or their wills. Even slaves are not really *owned* by their masters, for they may sell them to others, free them, or their slaves may die. Thus, they do not ultimately belong to their masters. Despite this, a master would not take his slave as an equal partner. How shameful it is, therefore, that you are happy to ascribe to Allah what you would be loath to ascribe to yourselves!

Notice that Allah does not address them in this matter by a statement, but rather, He poses a rhetorical question which is the best way to bring out the truth: '... do you make your slaves full partners with an equal share in what We have given you? Do you fear them as you fear each other?...' (*ar-Rum*: 28) Using a rhetorical question means he who poses it is sure of the answer he would receive from his addressee. A statement is open for affirmation or negation. A rhetorical question, on the other hand, is a way of getting the addressee to acknowledge the truth with which you are indirectly facing him. By posing a rhetorical question, one receives either the expected answer or

the addressee answers by silence which is itself an implied acknowledgement of the truth of what the other party has said. So by posing the question: ‘... do you make your slaves full partners with an equal share in what We have given you?...’ (*ar-Rum*: 28), the only answer to be expected is, ‘No, we certainly do not!’ This leads to the more important question: so why do you ascribe partners to Allah?

Allah says in the verse: ‘... an equal share in what We have given you...’ (*ar-Rum*: 28). What Allah gives us is not confined to money. We spoke about Divine provision before and said that Allah is the Provider, yet He respects the rights of His servants. He respects their hard efforts and preserves their rights to own what they have worked to gain even though everything originally comes from Him and He is the One Who possesses everything. He bestows His bounties on whomever He wills of His servants and does not take back the gifts He gives them. Even when Allah urges the rich to give charity to the poor and needy, He says: ‘Who will give Allah a good loan, which He will increase for him many times over?...’ (*al-Baqara*: 245) So you should consider the charity you give to your poor brother as a loan to Allah, which He will repay many times over.

As we said before, provision does not only mean money, as some think. Rather, your provision is everything from which you draw benefit, and so you should share it with those who need it and give out of it to those who lack it. Strength is a gift from Allah, so the strong should employ his strength to help the weak. Useful knowledge is also a Divine gift, so those who are blessed with it should pass it on to the ignorant. Forbearance is a gift, a sort of Divine bestowal. Those gifted with this personality trait should manifest it with others by being patient with them and restraining anger, and so on. Thus we see that money is the least valuable form of provision. Poverty has solutions in Islam. A particular share is prescribed for the poor, and in case of extreme poverty and lack of means, the afflicted person is permitted to beg for food. No one would die of hunger if Islamic rulings were truly applied. If circumstances force a poor person to beg, he should do that politely and gently. If he is hungry, he should not ask for money, but rather for food. This can remove every doubt concerning him. One who begs for food, undoubtedly,

needs only to satiate his hunger. Begging for money, however, may be suspected to be only out of greed and a desire to hoard. Begging for food spares us doubt or wondering. It spells out a real need.

In the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) and Khidr, Allah says in the Quran: '... They came to a town and asked the inhabitants for food but were refused hospitality...' (*al-Kahf*: 77). So when they refused to give them even a morsel of food, they deserved to be called the meanest of people. Islamic Law permits a hungry person to seek food, and even take it by force if he is denied it. If the owner of the food complains to the judge, the latter's verdict should be in favour of the hungry beggar. In such a case, a person who only wants a piece of bread to save his life cannot be called a transgressor.

Allah has undertaken to provide for you, yet He meanwhile commands you to do the effort you can, to employ the means He has created to make your livelihood. Only do your best and you will have no need to worry about anything else. Do not suppose that your work is the source of the provisions you earn. Rather, work is only the means we should employ, but provision comes only from Allah. Let it suffice as evidence that you may do effort yet fail to achieve the desired profit, for Allah has withheld it from you for a reason. Even if you think your provisions are rather straitened, stay reassured, for everything is already predestined by your Creator: He will send you your provisions in full. What Allah has decreed for you is sure to come to your door. Worry about provision is a primary source of anxiety and sadness. If people knew that the One Who has created them has undertaken to provide for them, that would put their hearts at ease. If you fail to attain a particular thing you wanted, be sure then it would not be good for you had you got it. Be sure also that Allah will make the right thing reach you in another way.

It may be appropriate here to mention the story of 'Urwa ibn Adhinah who was a friend of Hisham ibn 'Abd Al-Malik in Medina, before the latter came to power. Having become the caliph, Hisham moved to Damascus. 'Urwa fell into poverty and went through difficulties. Remembering his old friendship with Hisham, he set out for Damascus in the hope that the caliph would help him in his time of need. 'Urwa arrived at Damascus and asked permission to see the caliph which was granted to him. He met his friend and

explained his tough circumstances. Hisham was not successful in the answer he provided, 'You came from Medina to ask for help even though you are the one who once said:

Voracity and greed are alien to my character!

Whatever my provision, it will come from my Master!

This was the reply of 'Urwa, 'May Allah reward you well, for you have alerted me and reminded me of what I had forgotten.' Then he left.

Hisham reflected on the matter and, recalling the friendship that had bound him to 'Urwa, he regretted the way he had treated him. He allocated a large grant for 'Urwa and sent someone to follow him and give it to him. The envoy could not catch 'Urwa on the road and had to travel all the way to his home in Medina. The envoy was an intelligent man, so when 'Urwa opened the door and asked what he wanted, he said, 'I am Hisham's envoy, and this is his grant to you. He did not want you to carry it yourself, for fear you would be waylaid or that it would be a burden to you, so he sent it with me.' 'Urwa said, 'May Allah reward the Prince of the Believers. Tell him he recalled the first line, but had he remembered the second line as well, he would have spared all of us the trouble:

Voracity and greed are alien to my character!

Whatever my provision, it will come from my Master!

I struggle to seek it, and it tires me endlessly!

Had I just waited, it would come to me effortlessly!'⁽¹⁾

Back to the verse we are reflecting on ; Allah concludes it by saying: '...This is how We make Our messages clear to those who use their reason' (*ar-Rum*: 28). Allah shows them plainly and clearly so that when they are presented to an unbiased mind, it will surely accept them. The Arabic for 'reason' or 'mind' is '*aql*' which linguistically denotes 'fastening' or 'discretion'. This is because the mind is what checks people and prevents them from overstepping their limits.

Some people wrongly believe that the mind's role is to give free rein to whatever thoughts occur to them. The truth is quite the reverse. The mind's

(1) Al-Asfahani narrates this story in his *Al-Aghani*.

role is actually to keep you clear of such thoughts and govern your behaviour. It is to sort out your thoughts, to study them. It is to check your whims, not indulge in them and act based on what they dictate. Its role is to guide you to do and say what is right. Thus has Allah made everything clear in His Message.

A pure mind leads one to the truth about things. An example of this was wonderfully represented by Companion 'Umar Al-Farouq *Allah be pleased with him*. He would suggest a thing to Prophet Muhammad, and then Allah would send down a revelation in agreement with what 'Umar had suggested. Allah thus showed that when the mind is free of prejudices and caprices, it responds to right guidance and is even able to reach the truth by itself.

The mind is the means by which one forms one's perception. Allah says: 'And Allah has brought you forth from your mothers' wombs knowing nothing – but He has endowed you with hearing, and sight, and minds, so that you might have cause to be grateful' (*an-Nahl*: 78). The mind gathers data through the senses, which is how it forms its beliefs. The eyes see, the ears hear, the tongue tastes, the skin touches, the nose smells, and so on for all the other senses. There is the sense by which we determine weight, the thickness of objects and so on. Scientists call the well-known ones 'the five external senses' in order to leave room for the discovery of more. These senses perceive data and transmit these perceptions to the mind which analyses them and arrives at conclusions that form the basic foundational laws for life. We know through experience that honey is sweet, cheese is salty. This is how the mind forms its notions then passes them to the heart. When these notions settle in the heart, they become beliefs that do not need to be thought about again. They become ingrained in the heart and do not need to be considered by the mind again. The role of the mind is to choose between alternatives; those things for which there is no alternative do not need to be considered by the mind. For example, if you want to go to a place to which only one road leads, there is nothing to think about; if several ways lead to your destination, the mind has to compare them and choose the best.

The mind is the scale by which things are weighed and judged. The mind itself must be sound so it can reach sound, objective conclusions. We know that scales differ based on the thing that needs to be weighed. The mind has to be fit for making choices so it can be depended on and held accountable for

whatever it chooses. Take the sun and the moon for example; Allah says: 'The sun and the moon follow their calculated courses' (*ar-Rahman*: 5). They function according to a precise system. If this were not the case, and if they themselves did not follow an appointed course, we would not be able to use them to determine time. By the sun we know day and night and by the moon we know the months.

So when Allah says: '... This is how We make Our messages clear to those who use their reason' (*ar-Rum*: 28), disbelief is in no way to be justified. Allah has explained everything clearly in His revelations, so it only remains that you use your reason.

Since the mind is the means of perception, analysis, and choice-making, Allah exempts immature minds from moral responsibility: He excuses the young who have not yet reached the age of puberty because their minds are not yet fully developed, nor have their senses fully matured. Prophet Muhammad said, 'Teach your children to observe *salat* (prayer) at the age of seven and beat them (gently) for leaving it at the age of ten.'⁽¹⁾ So he made it the responsibility of parents to convey to children their own responsibilities at this age in order to make them accustomed to obedience of Divine commands and prohibitions even though they do not yet bear this responsibility. When the child grows, he accepts Allah's Commands as he first accepted his parents' commands. Allah allows the parents to give commands as well as punishment in the case of disobedience.

Besides young children, another category exempted from moral responsibility is that of the insane, for they cannot differentiate between right and wrong.

So Allah's revelation has made everything clear, one only has to use one's reason, which polytheists do not. What reason or wisdom can polytheism ever represent? What is the meaning of worshipping idols, trees, the sun, or the moon? They say: '... We worship them for no other reason than that they bring us nearer to Allah...' (*az-Zumar*: 3). Worship means obedience in the first place. It is to comply with the Divine commands and prohibitions, and what laws have those false deities set? What guidance have they revealed to their

(1) Cited by Abu Dawud and Ahmad

worshippers? What rewards have they promised for the obedient or punishment for the disobedient? Nothing at all and nothing is easier for anyone than to worship a god that assigns to him no responsibilities, a god that does not command him to check his whims and desires or fulfil his duties. Worshipping such false deities is a sufficient proof that their worshippers do not use their reason.

In this universe, Allah has created various kinds and species and has made some of His creatures superior to others. Some kinds of creatures have things in common with humankind, like feeling and movement. Still, they have no intellect or ability to consider alternatives because they are ruled by their instincts. These are the animals which never act contrary to their instincts. We have previously given the example of the sexual instinct and made a comparison between desire in humans and desire in animals. Allah has made desire for the purpose of procreation and preservation of the species. Animals, governed by instinct, fulfil the purpose of procreation and stop there. Once the male has impregnated the female he does not approach her again. Smelling her odour and discovering that she is pregnant, a male would not mate with her.⁽¹⁾ People, however, are different in this respect. They too have desires. Women bear the difficulties of pregnancy and the pain of childbirth, and then the parents bear the difficulties of raising children until they reach adulthood. Allah has made this labour – which is necessary for the preservation of humankind – come about as the result of such strong pleasure because otherwise no woman would ever consent to bear her second child.

What we have said about the sexual instinct can also be said about eating and drinking. Animals are governed in these matters by pure instinct, untainted by caprice, and so when they are full, they eat no more, no matter how hard you try to make them.⁽²⁾ A donkey would not eat a single piece of clover when it is full. It would pass by mint leaves and mallow without eating them and seek out dry grass instead; they know their own food because of the instinct that Allah has placed within them. As for people, they eat until they

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- (1) This information is according to the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Sha'rawi *may 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]
- (2) [From Proofreader] This information is according to the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Sha'rawi *may 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.

are fit to burst, not forgetting desserts, foods which aid digestion and so on. Many people would thus eat more than their capacities because they are enslaved by the desires of their stomachs. They would not leave the table until they are full to the brim.

I have known men who have worked at the zoo here in Egypt. They told me something a little peculiar about animals' behaviour during the earthquake of 1992. They saw the caged animals become very agitated before the quake began. The first that showed this agitation were bats, then giraffes, crocodiles, apes, then finally donkeys. They almost broke their cages to escape. Immediately after, the earthquake struck. In Agadir of Morocco, something similar to this was noticed before an earthquake: donkeys broke free from their confinements and ran to the open space, and then the earthquake struck. So animals can feel earthquakes before they happen.

Allah mentions in the Quran the crow that taught humankind how to bury the dead. Allah tells us about the story of the two sons of Adam *peace be upon him*: 'Allah sent a raven to scratch up the ground and show him how to cover his brother's corpse...' (*al-Ma'ida*: 31).

So Allah has created humankind, animals, and plants that all have life and experience growth, and lifeless objects which represent the lowest class in existence. Each of these kinds has been made in the service of the higher kinds. By worshipping false deities, the disbelievers make the lowest class of creatures into the highest and greatest form: they make objects or animals gods to worship. What can prove the deficiency of their minds more strikingly?

Then, Allah says:

بَلِ اتَّبَعَ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا أَهْوَاءَهُمْ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ فَمَنْ
يَهْدِي مَنْ أَضَلَّ اللَّهُ وَمَا لَهُمْ مِنْ نَاصِرِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

And still the idolaters follow their own desires without any knowledge. Who can guide those God leaves to stray, who have no one to help them? [29] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 29)

They follow their own desires in that they choose to worship that which has no guidance to give them and no duties to assign to them. They worship

gods that neither command nor forbid anything and neither punish wrongdoers nor reward the righteous. They are false gods they have invented out of their desires and prejudices.

When one's choice is based on desire or prejudice rather than reason, the mind is spoiled. It becomes nothing but an apologist, always trying to justify incorrect choices without considering the consequences. Rather, the mind should control desire and make all one's actions conform to principles, not caprices. Some people think that desire is inherently evil. However, this is quite inaccurate. Conflicting desires are a great evil, but when one makes his desires submissive to Divine law, they are all moulded into one, which creates harmony rather than conflict. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'None of you [truly] believes until his desire is in line with what I have been sent with [from Allah].'⁽¹⁾ So desire is not essentially evil. Rather, when it conforms to what Allah loves, it motivates one to struggle in His cause. Evil exists when desires are conflicting, when each follows his own whims irrespective of Allah's guidance. Allah wants the members of the believing community to subject their desires to Divine laws, to support one another rather than contradict one another. The conflict of desires destroys the flow of life and squanders its fruits. When our desires agree with what Allah wills, our lives can yield the desired fruits: 'Does He not know, Who created? And He is the Knower of the subtleties, the Aware' (*al-Mulk*: 14). Every maker knows best what he has made. Allah has made us and knows best what sets our lives on the right course. He has sent down guidance to teach us the limits of our desires, yet some people defy His laws and replace them by defective manmade laws.

For someone to set laws to regulate life and manage all its affairs, he must be infallible. He must possess omnipotent knowledge. Nothing should escape him in the entire existence. Does this apply to any mortal? Our knowledge is limited, and what we hold as truth is subject to change and amendment later when it becomes clear that it was inaccurate or incorrect. We constantly change our views when we discover things we have not known before.

Furthermore, a lawgiver must be disinterested and all the subjects of his authority must be equal in his eyes. Otherwise, prejudices will interfere with

(1) Narrated by Ibn Abu 'Asim

the laws he sets, as we have seen in communism, capitalism, and many other manmade doctrines.

Omnipotent Knowledge and Absolute Wisdom belong only to Allah. Also, all creatures are equal before Him, so no prejudices or inaccuracies are ever likely to taint His judgements. Before Allah, we are all equal, for He has neither a spouse nor a child towards whom He would be biased. He reassures us, saying: ‘and that He – exalted be the glory of our Lord! – has neither spouse nor child’ (*al-Jinn*: 3). He has no spouse to influence Him or a child to indulge. Wives and children are among a man’s points of weakness. They would cause a man to stray from justice.

Furthermore, Allah has no interest whatsoever regarding anything He legislates for us. He has created us with His omnipotent power, and He is free of any need of us; obedience of His servants does not benefit Him, nor does their defiance harm Him. Therefore, He alone sets laws for us. He alone is worthy of obedience.

As for Allah’s Commands and Obligations, we have stated before that it is not appropriate to consider only the rights that you have to fulfil. Rather, consider obligations also as a means to protect you. Just as you are forbidden to transgress against others, the same law forbids all others from transgressing against you, and so the law is in your favour.

Thus, if we use our intelligence, we will willingly act upon what Allah ordains; the problem is that most people do not listen and do not understand. ‘And still the idolaters follow their own desires without any knowledge...’ (*ar-Rum*: 29). They were evildoers because they allowed their desires to go at variance with the Law of Allah. With no laws governing them, desires conflicted and they strayed into misguidance and confusion. By their idolatry, they only wronged themselves, as Allah says: ‘...attributing partners to Him is a terrible wrong!’ (*Luqman*: 13) By attributing partners to Allah *the Almighty* in worship, those polytheists actually wronged none but themselves, for they wrongly preferred the temporal lusts and desires of this worldly life to the permanent blessings of the Hereafter, paying no attention at all to the bad results of following their own whims. Here, we stress that they did so because they either did not really like doing good to themselves,

or they did like it, but in a way that leads to nothing but destruction and this is the damage done when desires are given preference over reason and are allowed to govern the mind.

So they follow their desires: '... without any knowledge...' (*ar-Rum*: 29). What is knowledge? It means proving what we hold as true. We teach the young that Allah is One. If we can support this fact by proofs, this is knowledge. Otherwise, this is blind imitation. The opposite of knowledge is ignorance. It does not mean 'not to know', but to insist that you know while what you hold to be true is proven to be wrong. It has been proven that the earth is spherical. Whoever does not know this fact is illiterate, for if they are told about it, he would just agree having no evidence or background to argue it is untrue. Ignorance is to claim the earth is not spherical, while you have no proof to support your claim. So there is a difference between being ignorant and being uninformed. An uninformed person has no idea one way or the other, so if you tell him something, he will just accept it without argument. An ignorant person, however, stubbornly clings to a notion which is incorrect, so first you need to rid him of the wrong notion before you instil the right one.

If a notion has not reached the level where we accept it completely, consider: if the possibility of its truth is equal to that of its falsehood, we call this doubt. If the possibility of its being true is stronger, this is an assumption, and if the possibility of its being false is stronger, this is illusion. So the different kinds of notions are: knowledge, ignorance, imitation, assumption, and illusion.

Allah wants our lives to be governed based on knowledge and certainty, notions proven by evidence to be true. When people follow their conflicting desires and act upon them without knowledge, Allah leads them far astray, so long as this is their choice and preference; He says: '... Who can guide those Allah leaves to stray? ...' (*ar-Rum*: 29) They let desire prevail over reason and preferred to disbelieve in Allah despite all the proofs He has sent down to them. None except Allah can help them. Due to their persistence in defying Him, He places a seal on their hearts so that faith may not enter and disbelief may not leave. Allah assists all of His servants with whatever they choose: He

grants guidance to those who choose faith, and leads further astray those who choose disbelief. He says: ‘Allah has sealed their hearts and their hearing, and over their eyes is a veil; and awesome suffering awaits them’ (*al-Baqara*: 7). Let everyone, therefore, take heed. Allah tries us with hardship to test the firmness of our faith, not to torture us. Some choose to immerse themselves in grief and sorrow. They do not try to forget or find solace in anything, out of resentment towards Allah’s decree. Consequently, Allah increases their sadness, for this is what they choose to have. Life is not an incessant cycle of tragedy. Do not leave the door open to misery and lamentation, but rather close it and nail it shut with the power of contentment. Do not let your hearts surrender to sadness. Seek out Allah’s help and trust Him. If you choose to give in to sorrow and resentment, He will grant you whatever you choose.

‘... Who can guide those Allah leaves to stray? ...’ (*ar-Rum*: 29) Who can save them and give them laws to protect them if their Lord leaves them to do whatever they please? No one can. If you advise your friend time and again and he does not listen to you, you finally give up. It was once said, ‘Advise your friend from dawn until noon, and from noon until midday. If he pays you no heed, give him false advice, and spend the rest of the day deceiving him!’

We spoke before about the correct way to scrutinise a matter in order to make a sound judgement about it. Do not study anything with any prior prejudices, but uproot them from your heart and consider the matter objectively. Then, submit the matter to your mind, and if the mind approves it, pass it to your heart. A considerable amount of bias against Islam is owed to the fact that we discuss it while our hearts lean towards communism, for example, which of course yields unsound conclusions.

So those who choose to follow their desires ‘... have no one to help them’ (*ar-Rum*: 29), an assertion by which Allah concludes the verse. No one can save them after Allah has let them stray and placed a seal on their hearts so that faith cannot enter them. Allah alone protects all, and none can be protected from Him.

Then, Allah says:

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا يَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ
 اللَّهُ ذَلِكَ الذِّبْتُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

**So [Prophet] as a man of pure faith, stand firm and true in
 your devotion to the religion. This is the natural disposition
 God instilled in mankind – there is no altering God's
 creation – and this is the right religion, though most people
 do not realize it [30] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 30)**

This is addressed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. As long as they have followed their desires and insisted on misguidance, then leave them and do not grieve on account of their rejection, O Prophet. It pained him *peace and blessings be upon him* that many insisted on going astray, so Allah addressed him, saying: '[Prophet], are you going to worry yourself to death because they will not believe?' (*ash-Shu'ara*: 3) He also said to him: 'But [Prophet] are you going to worry yourself to death over them if they do not believe in this message?' (*al-Kahf*: 6) Allah has made it clear to His Prophet that he was responsible only for delivering the Message. He did not have to be disturbed by their stubbornness or saddened because they plotted against him, for Allah has already decreed that they would never gain victory over him. Allah has promised Prophet Muhammad victory over his opponents: 'Our word has already been given to Our servants the messengers: it is they who will be helped, and the ones who support Our cause will be the winners' (*as-Saffat*: 171-173). He also says: 'And Allah will most certainly succour him who succours His cause...' (*al-Hajj*: 40). He says in another verse: '... If you help [the cause of] Allah, He will help you...' (*Muhammad*: 7). These are fundamental matters about faith, settled and complete. They are recited by the tongues and established in the hearts. Allah thus reassured His Messenger, Muhammad that even though the condition of Muslims at that time seemed at variance with that truth, things would certainly change, for this is what happened to previous nations. It is the law of Allah and must certainly apply to you as well: 'So be patient [Prophet], for Allah's Promise is sure: whether We show you part of what We have promised them [the disbelievers] in this life or whether We take your soul back to Us first, it is to Us that they will be returned' (*Ghafir*: 77).

Since this is the case: ‘...stand firm and true in your devotion to the religion...’ (*ar-Rum*: 30). Leave them to their misguidance so long as they persist in obstinacy. Devote your time to your mission of calling for Allah’s religion and do not let them distract you from it. Allah uses the word *wajh* (face) as we have pointed out, for the face symbolises direction: ‘... stand firm and true in your devotion to [set your face to] the religion...’ (*ar-Rum*: 30). It means: devote yourself to your Lord alone and do not turn from Him. The word *wajh* also means ‘self’ or ‘being’, as in the verse: ‘... Everything is bound to perish, save His [eternal] *Wajh* Self...’ (*al-Qasas*: 88).

In the verse, Allah describes His religion by the word *hanif*. This has been subject to much debate by those who like to search for ‘mistakes’ in the Word of Allah. This word literally denotes ‘bending’ or ‘deviating’. Arabs use it to refer to the bowlegged. In what way is the religion of Allah ‘bending’ or ‘deviating’, then? Those who question the accuracy of the Quranic rhetoric simply do not understand it. Prophet Muhammad was sent to reform a corrupt, perverted society whose only religion was idolatry. Religion came to show people the Straight Path, and in this sense, it just ‘deviates’ or ‘bends’ the course of behaviour from the path of corruption and evildoing. The meaning is therefore ‘deviation from falsehood’ which means following the truth.

Even though the command in this verse is directly addressed to Prophet Muhammad, it is also meant for all Muslims. What is addressed to the Messenger of Allah is also addressed to the entire community of the believers. In the next verse, there is a proof that the verse we are considering is addressed to all Muslims, for Allah says: ‘Turn to Him alone, all of you...’ (*ar-Rum*: 31) which means the command is addressed to all. An example of this can also be found in the verse: ‘Prophet, when any of you intend to divorce women, do so at a time when their prescribed waiting period can properly start...’ (*at-Talaq*: 1). Apparently, the address is for Prophet Muhammad only, yet it is clear from the structure of the verse that it is meant for the whole community of Muslims. Address is directed to Prophet Muhammad because he was the one who delivered the Message. Allah directs our attention to this understanding when He says: ‘The Messenger of Allah is an excellent model for those of you who...’ (*al-Ahzab*: 21).

Messengers were sent to societies where corruption reigned absolutely. Just as Allah has created physical immunities in the body, He has also created spiritual immunities. The lower self would insinuate one to chase his desires, and he would obey it, but then he regrets what he has done and his conscience stings him for his sin. He would perhaps even hate those who helped him commit it. This is the self-reproaching soul, and this behaviour is a sign that goodness lies within that person. This self-reproach is the intrinsic immunity with which Allah has endowed us. It comes from within.

Some seek out sin and rush to it, craving unlawful indulgences. Others, on the other hand, do not seek it or plan for it, but they just fall prey to it when the temptation comes in their way. This is clear from Allah's words: 'But Allah only undertakes to accept repentance from those who do evil out of ignorance and soon afterwards repent...' (*an-Nisa'*: 17). One would travel to a place known to be rife with temptations and indulgences on purpose to attain transient pleasures. Another would travel to the same place to study. Then, he inadvertently meets with a temptation, a girl for example, and falls because of his weakness into sin. The former had intended sin and planned for it. The latter never planned for it, let alone sought it out. He would regret his weakness, and the self-reproaching self would stir up within him. As for the other person, his soul has grown accustomed to sin, so his spiritual immunity has almost deteriorated. Since nothing within him prevents him from sin, society has to deter him.

Spiritual immunity does not mean a perfect society where sin does not exist. Sins will inevitably be committed. Each person has weaknesses and strengths, so one is responsible for offering advice in areas where he can control himself. A thief needs an honest person to advise him. One who inclines to looking at women when he has no right to needs a virtuous man to advise him, and so on. This is why Allah says: 'By the declining day, man is [deep] in loss, except for those who believe, do good deeds, urge one another to the truth, and urge one another to steadfastness' (*al-'Asr*: 1-3). Sometimes corruption grew so rife that no one at all urged another to the truth, as Allah says about the Jews: 'They would not prevent one another from doing whatever hateful things they did...' (*al-Ma'ida*: 79). In such cases, not only the individual loses spiritual immunity, but society in its entirety. It was in

those cases that Allah sent new Messengers with new miracles to save people and restore them to the Straight Path.

As we have said earlier, Allah has endowed us with natural physical immunity to resist diseases. He has also made the truth intrinsic to our natural disposition, as He says: ‘... This is the natural disposition Allah instilled in mankind...’ (*ar-Rum*: 30). Allah says about the formation of the human foetus: ‘People, [remember,] if you doubt the Resurrection, that We created you from dust, then a drop of fluid, then a clinging form, then a lump of flesh, both shaped and unshaped...’ (*al-Hajj*: 5). Allah forms the body organs and also provides the body with what is needed to repair any defects in them. He has created mechanisms in the body by which injured organs mend and renew themselves. In addition to this, Allah has also created in us the basis of high morality; His religion is instilled in the natural disposition of humankind. So Allah has given us a conscience to alert us when we grow heedless. He has also set laws for society to deter sinners who lack this self-reproaching mechanism. Finally, when all fail, He would send Messengers to call people for His guidance.

Since Allah has willed that no other Messenger will be sent after Prophet Muhammad, He guarantees that righteousness and virtue will remain among his followers until the Final Hour. The community of Muslims will never be corrupted to the extent that it loses all goodness in individuals and in society. Even if some go astray, others will always be there to restore them to what is right, and this is clear in the words of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘There will always be a part of my community who support the truth and who will not be harmed by those who forsake them until Allah’s decree comes while they are so.’⁽¹⁾ He also said, ‘Goodness will be in my community [Muslims] until the Day of Judgement.’⁽²⁾

In the Arabic structure of the verse we are considering, the word *fitra* (natural disposition) is in the accusative case, even though no verb is mentioned before it. The style here is intended to alert us to a verb that is omitted. This verb may be estimated, and so the meaning can be literally as follows:

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

(2) Cited by *Al-Qari, As-Suyuti and Al-Ajluni*

'...keep to *fitra* (natural disposition)'. Thus the verse implies a command that we turn away from all that is false and remain steadfast in faith, based on the creed Allah has instilled into our natural disposition. Grammarians term this style 'inducement', for it is meant to alert us to a truth and induce us to commit ourselves to it. Here Allah has commanded Prophet Muhammad to keep to natural disposition, the true religion, and not be concerned with evildoers who sought to hinder him.

The word *fitra* also means 'creation'. In the following verse, we find one of its derivatives: '... *Fatir* (Creator) of the heavens and the earth...' (*Yusuf*: 101).

Allah says: 'I created jinn and mankind only to worship Me' (*adh-Dhariyat*: 56). This is the truth. This is the pledge we have given to our Lord since we were still in the realm of the unseen before we came into existence. Allah says: '[Prophet], when your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, "Am I not your Lord?" and they replied, "Yes, we bear witness"...' (*al-A'raf*: 172). We have previously explained that in every one of us there is a living atom from our father Adam. A human being is formed by the male sperm that fertilises the female ovum, and if we follow this chain back we will surely arrive at Adam *peace be upon him*. This atom that remains within each one of us is the one that has made the above-mentioned testimony, the first covenant Allah took from us. Otherwise, how could the disbelievers who lived during the pre-Islamic era of ignorance admit that creation was the work of Allah? He says: 'If you [Prophet] ask them, "Who created the heavens and earth?" They are sure to answer, "God"...' (*az-Zumar*: 38). How did they know this truth? It was transmitted to them through the aforesaid first covenant, and since this covenant, none of Allah's creatures have dared to claim that he is the creator. Everyone actually knows that Allah is the creator, despite the distorted religious beliefs many people hold. Even a disbeliever or an atheist, at hard times, would call none but the True God. They do not call their idol. They do not implore the false gods they have invented, for they know this is plain falsehood. When there is danger, they would not cheat themselves or lie to themselves. At this point, when times are hard, they have no one but Allah, the One God, to turn to, and this is because of the truth He has instilled into us all.

Since Allah has instilled the truth in our natural disposition, there can be no changing His Will: ‘... there is no altering Allah’s creation...’ (*ar-Rum*: 30). No one can claim that they have created the heavens and earth or anything in them.

Allah concludes the verse by saying: ‘... and this is the right religion, though most people do not realise it’ (*ar-Rum*: 30). They do not possess true knowledge which we have explained to mean a matter which conforms to reality and can be proved by evidence.

Allah says in the following verse:

مُنِيبِينَ إِلَيْهِ وَاتَّقُوهُ وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَلَا تَكُونُوا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

**Turn to Him alone, all of you. Be mindful of Him;
keep up the prayer; do not join those who ascribe
partners to God [31] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 31)**

Turning to Allah means cutting off all ties with falsehood. It means directing your soul to Him only and never letting anyone or anything influence your religious creed. It means employing reason and keeping to the truth Allah has made intrinsic to our natural disposition.

Allah then says ‘... Be mindful of Him...’ (*ar-Rum*: 31). One cannot profess faith in Allah, while he deviates from the guidance He has given us to regulate our lives. Faith must be associated with obedience to Him *the Exalted*. This is why whenever Allah talks about faith in the Quran, He necessarily associates it with good deeds: ‘Not so those who believe, do good deeds...’ (*ash-Shu’ara*: 227). Faith is to believe in the One True God and that His Guidance is the Truth. It is to believe that Allah’s Guidance is for our own prosperity in this life and the next. All those aspects of faith can be proven and clearly manifested through righteous deeds. To believe and not act upon your belief is insincere.

Mindfulness of Allah is to fear His Wrath and avoid anything that may lead to it, which is attained only through obeying His ordinance. It means to build a barrier between you and His Wrath and punishment, Hell Fire, by committing yourself to His commands.

Allah then says: ‘... keep up the prayer...’ (*ar-Rum*: 31). Offer it in the best way you can, and offer it as Allah loves. When you hear the call to prayer (*salat*), ‘Allah is the Greatest!’ respond to Him, Allah is in no need of our obedience, nor does He gain any benefit from our worship, but rather, we are the ones who benefit from this worship. We benefit from standing before Him in prayer. It is a chance to connect with Allah and derive assistance and strength from Him. *Salat* is a wonderful way of nurturing our faith. What do you think of a machine checked five times daily by its inventor? Will it ever break down? This is what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has taught us: if ever any harm befalls us, we should immediately seek refuge with *salat* which is just what He used to do whenever he faced any difficulty. What is the meaning of faith in Allah if you do not seek refuge with Him?

Just as we do not see Allah, we do not see how He takes care of us and manages our affairs. He governs everything in our lives, but we do not always notice His ways. Allah has enjoined on us to perform the five daily prayers and has made them one of the tenets of faith from which we are never excused. As for *zakat* (obligatory alms) and *hajj* (Pilgrimage), for example, they are obligatory only for those who can afford it. One may be exempted from observing *sawm* (fasting) if he is sick or traveling, for the missed days must be made up for afterwards when he heals or returns from travel. As for *salat* (prayer), however, it has to be observed daily at the five appointed times. It is a means of renewing our pledge with Allah. It is our covenant with Him, the five daily meetings by which He has honoured us.

We said before that if you want to meet with an important person or a highly ranked person, you have to go through all sorts of procedures just to get permission. He gets to choose the time, place, even the subject of the meeting, what will be discussed and then he has the right to end it whenever he pleases.

Henceforth, you have no control over any part of this meeting. Yet when you meet your Lord *the Almighty* it is completely different: your Lord is the One Who seeks you and calls you to come to Him, not only once but five times a day. He allows you to say what you like to Him and ask whatever you like.

You can end the meeting by saying, ‘Peace be upon you’. If you want to make it a long meeting, or stay in your Lord’s house, He will not lose interest

until you do. So this is not slavery, but rather a kind of majesty and nobility. A poet once expressed this concept nicely: ⁽¹⁾

It is enough honour for me that I am a worshipper
Whose Lord welcomes him without appointment?
Despite His holiness and magnificence,
I can meet him however and wherever I choose.

Because prayer holds this high position amongst the Pillars of Islam, it was not established by means of revelation as the others were, but rather, it was given directly by Allah to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* when his Lord called him to meet with Him in the heavens at the Night Ascension.

We compared this before (and Allah is beyond compare) to a company director who usually gives his orders by telephone, or memo, yet if the matter is very important he calls the employee into his office and gives him the instruction directly as it is so important. This was the case with the prayer and how it was given to the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* directly.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: '...and be not among those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Him' (*ar-Rum*: 31). We have to stop and consider here for a moment. Why, after mentioning the return to Allah, and Allah-consciousness, and the establishment of prayer, did He say: '...and be not among those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Him'? (*ar-Rum*: 31) What does idolatry have to do with those who fulfil these teachings in this way? They say that the ascription of divinity prohibited here is not to associate other gods with Allah, but rather to include others in an intention that should be solely for Allah. Consequently, it means ostentation, showing-off and looking to other people instead of Allah.

They, then, say that doing good deeds for the sake of other people is ostentation, and leaving good deeds for the sake of other people is idolatry. So the one who prays, or builds a mosque for Allah, desiring thereby to be famous and to be praised by the people is guilty of ostentation and he loses out and fails thereby because the people benefit from his action but he himself

(1) It is Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi's own poem *Allah rest his soul*.

benefits nothing. Giving up a good action because one fears he will fall into ostentation, or not paying the poor-due, for example, because one fears he will be accused of ostentation, makes this person an idolater. This is because the people would have benefitted from the action even if it was ostentation, but if you give up the action altogether, no one benefits anything from you.

So the meaning of '...and be not among those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Him' (*ar-Rum*: 31) is the hidden idolatry of ostentation. So we see that Prophet Muhammad, the role model for the faithful, prayed to his Lord: 'O Allah, I seek your forgiveness for every action for which I sought Your Countenance but in which there was intermingled a part that was not for You.'⁽¹⁾

So a faithful deed is that which is sincerely for Allah, and its reward is according to its sincerity. There are those who do good deeds because it benefits them in some way to do so, perhaps by helping them to organise their lives, or to save money, or some such thing, so they do it not for Allah but for their own interests. About such people, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And there is, too, among men many a one who worships Allah on the borderline [of faith]: thus, if good befalls him, he is satisfied with Him; but if a trial assails him, he turns away utterly, losing [thereby both] this world and the life to come: [and] this, indeed, is a loss beyond compare!' (*al-Hajj*: 11)

Look at a salesman, for example, who might be honest in his dealings not out of honesty itself but rather out of a desire for renown and a good reputation so they can attract more customers. Such people get what they can in this world and Allah *the Almighty* does not deny them the fruits of their labours, as He says: 'To him who desires a harvest in the life to come, We shall grant an increase in his harvest; whereas to him who desires [but] a harvest in this world, We [may] give something thereof – but he will have no share in [the blessings of] the life to come' (*Ghafir*: 20). Such people are, in their intentions, so similar to a travelling party all going the same way, but each with their own reason for travelling: this one wants delicious food, this one is going to see a beautiful woman, this one wants to study and benefit from his learning, this one wants to visit his loved ones. A poet expressed this notion by saying:

(1) Narrated by Ibn Rajab and Abu Na'im

I joined them to visit my beloved, and said,
 'Eat, all of you, and take what you need,
 But leave me to meet with the one I seek,
 My eyes already see him, my longing calls me.'

Just so, the True Lord *the Almighty* wants His servant to seek Him for His own sake, not out of fear of His Hell or longing for His Paradise. There is a difference between enjoying Allah's bounties and enjoying the looking at Allah. You eat in paradise, but not because of any hunger, or need, but rather simply for enjoyment.

Allah *the Almighty* says about the martyrs: 'But do not think of those that have been slain in Allah's cause as dead. Nay, they are alive! With their Lord have they their sustenance' (*Al-Imran*: 169). It is enough for them to experience this togetherness, and to look upon Allah *the Almighty*.

So Rabi'a Al-'Adawiyya *Allah be pleased with her* said: 'O Allah, if You see that I worship You out of desire for Your Paradise, deny it to Me; and if You see that I worship You out of fear of Your Hell, put me in it; rather, I worship You because You deserve to be worshipped.'

Doubtless, only a small amount of people worship Allah with pure sincerity. The majority act completely randomly without any intention at all, so this matter does not concern them, and they are not interested in it, as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And most of them do not even believe in Allah without [also] ascribing divine powers to other beings beside Him'. (*Yusuf*: 106)

مِنَ الَّذِينَ فَرَّقُوا دِينَهُمْ وَكَانُوا شِيعًا كُلُّ حِزْبٍ بِمَا لَدَيْهِمْ فَرِحُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

Those who divide their religion into sects, with each party rejoicing in their own [32] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 32)

They broke their religion apart like a group of travellers who disperse to their different destinations. As to 'Into sects', the word 'sect' means a group that cooperate with one another in something, whether good or evil. An example of a *shi'a* 'good sect' is: 'And, behold, of his persuasion was Abraham (Ibrahim),

too' (*as-Saffat*: 83); a bad one is: 'Behold, Pharaoh exalted himself in the land and divided its people into castes...' (*al-Qasas*: 4).

In another verse: '...It is He alone who has the power to let loose upon you suffering from above you or from beneath your feet, or to confound you with mutual discord and let you taste the fear of one another...' (*al-An'am*: 65) with 'each party rejoicing in their own' (*ar-Rum*: 32).

Here, Allah says: 'with each party rejoicing in their own' (*ar-Rum*: 32) because of the temporal power they gain thereby, and because of the position of power they fear to lose such as that which prevented the Jews of Medina from believing in the Messenger of Allah even though they recognised him as they recognised their own sons. They knew it was his time and had been living in Medina waiting for his coming. All of this was written in their Torah, and they would even clash with the idol-worshippers and used to say to them, 'The time is long due for the Prophet of the end of time to come and we will follow him, and with him slay you as Iram and 'Ad were slain!'⁽¹⁾

'...Whenever there came unto them something which they recognised [as the truth], they would deny it...' (*al-Baqara*: 89). They disbelieved because they wanted to preserve their temporal power. They were a people of knowledge, wealth, and high status. When Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent, this power was annulled, for his was the absolute last word. As for those of them who kept to their true religion and did as the Torah commanded, they believed in Muhammad. These included 'Abdullah ibn Salam and other rabbis like him.

(1) Mohammad ibn Ishaq narrated from 'Asim ibn 'Umar, from Qutada Al-Ansari, that certain leaders of the Helpers said: 'By Allah, this story was revealed about us, and them (the Helpers), and the Jews who lived amongst them', meaning '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...' (*al-Baqara*: 89). They said: 'We were always stronger than them in the time of pagan ignorance, and we were idolaters whilst they were followers of scripture, and they would say: 'A prophet will soon be sent whom we will follow, and his time is long due, and with him we will slay you as Iram and 'Ad were slain!' Then, when Allah sent His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* from Quraysh and we followed him, they disbelieved in him.' Narrated by Ibn Kathir in his (*Tafsir*) (i. 124)

So it is temporal power that comes between people and the truth in which they believe; and this is the temporal power that we see now being contested by different sects and parties all claiming that they have the truth and that all else is falsehood. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'But if the truth were in accord with their own likes and dislikes, the heavens and the earth would surely have fallen into ruin, and all that lives in them [would long ago have perished]...' (*al-Mu'minun*: 71); so each of them vies with the other to make his way of thinking supreme and to gain authority.

After this, the True Lord *the Almighty* tells us that those who disbelieve in Allah or rebel against His guidance will remain prisoners to this temporal power, yet when an affliction befalls them from which their means cannot defend them, they have no choice but to turn to Allah. He says:

وَإِذَا مَسَّ النَّاسَ ضُرٌّ دَعَوْا رَبَّهُمْ مُنِيبِينَ إِلَيْهِ ثُمَّ إِذَا
أَذَاقَهُمْ مِنْهُ رَحْمَةً إِذَا فَرِيقٌ مِنْهُمْ بِرَبِّهِمْ يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

When something bad happens to people, they cry to their Lord and turn to Him for help, but no sooner does He let them taste His blessing than – lo and behold! – some of them ascribe partners to their Lord [33] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 33)

Affliction *durr* is something which harms us, and to which the soul is averse. When affliction befalls them, and their material means cannot rid them of it, 'they cry to their Lord and turn to Him for help,' that is, they return to Him *the Almighty* and now they know they have a Lord to turn to. This reminds us of what the Arabs said when the Revelation ceased for a while to come to the Messenger of Allah. This pleased them, so they said, 'Muhammad's Lord has forsaken him.'⁽¹⁾ Glory be to Allah, so now you recognise that Muhammad has a Lord!

(1) *Ibn Kathir* narrates in his (*Tafsir*) (iv. 522) from *Sufyan ibn 'Uyayna* from *Aswad ibn Qays*, who heard *Jundi* say: 'Gabriel did not come to the Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him for a long time, so the idolaters said, 'Muhammad's Lord has forsaken him!'' So Allah the Almighty revealed: 'Consider the bright morning hours, [1] and the night when it grows still and dark. [2] Thy Sustainer has not forsaken thee, nor does He scorn thee [3]' (*ad-Duha*: 1-3).

We said before that at times of strife and trial, the believer does not lie to himself or deceive himself; we told the story of the local barber-surgeon who used to fulfil the role that doctors now perform, when a medical school opened and began graduating doctors, one of them went to the village of this barber-surgeon, the barber began to attack him, claiming that he had no medical experience. Yet when the barber's own son fell ill, he was worried for him, and he secretly took him at night to the doctor because at such a moment, he would not cheat himself.

But '... no sooner does He let them taste His blessing than – lo and behold! – some of them ascribe partners to their Lord' (*ar-Rum*: 33), that is, they return to the idolatry they had practised before. If we reflect on this matter, we find that the Quran sometimes presents it referring to a single individual, as in: 'Now [thus it is:] when affliction befalls man, he is likely to cry out to his Lord, turning unto Him...' (*az-Zumar*: 8). He says: 'For [thus it is:] when affliction befalls man, he cries out unto Us, whether he be lying on his side or sitting or standing; but as soon as We have freed him of his affliction, he goes on as though he had never invoked Us to save him from the affliction that befell him!...' (*Yunus*: 12).

Focusing on a single individual is not enough by itself to confirm this phenomenon because a single person might humble himself before his Lord, return to Him after daring to disobey Him, keep this to himself so that no one else knows about it. But Allah wanted to emphasise that this happens with all people, in order to expose each of them to the other, so here He says: 'When something bad happens to people, they cry to their Lord and turn to Him for help...' (*ar-Rum*: 33).

He says: 'and so, when they embark on a ship [and find themselves in danger], they call unto Allah, [at that moment] sincere in their faith in Him alone; but as soon as He has brought them safe ashore, they [begin to] ascribe to imaginary powers a share in His divinity' (*al-'Ankabut*: 65).

So here the plural form is used in order to expose the disbelievers to one another. Amongst those who prayed in this circumstance might have been one who attempted to dissuade them from calling on Allah, and keep them from believing in Him, yet now he too is praying with humility. If their matter is

fully exposed, this will be all the more reason for them to become upright, and all the more reason for none of them to look down on any other.

I said that one of the special qualities of prayer is that it makes people equal, so that an ordinary man sits next to those with whom he cannot have hoped to sit, and they are all submissive, and obedient to the Imam, and so on. In the prayer, everyone is equal, and everyone benefits from this equality, and takes admonition from it so that they will never look down on anyone again.

The word used here for 'happens' is *mass* which actually means a light touch. So the meaning here is that a slight affliction befalls them, and yet still their material means failed them, and they panicked and cried for aid.

As for the phrase 'He lets them taste', taste is one of man's senses, by which he senses food as it passes over a specific area of the tongue; and once the food has passed over this area, the person no longer tastes it. So the pleasure of food is confined to this particular area of the mouth. Taste is the strongest influence over whether the soul will accept the tasted thing or not, so the popular saying goes, 'Once something gets past the tongue, only putrefaction remains for it.'

Consider how the True Lord *the Almighty* uses the concept of taste in connection with torment when He gives us this parable: 'And Allah propounds [to you] a parable: [Imagine] a town which was [once] secure and at ease, with its sustenance coming to it abundantly from all quarters, and which thereupon blasphemously refused to show gratitude for Allah's blessings: and therefore Allah caused it to taste the all-embracing misery of hunger and fear in result of all [the evil] that its people had so persistently wrought' (*an-Nahl*: 112). The mention of taste along with clothing (literally 'the all-embracing garment') implies a complete encompassing of the body, the same is the case with fear and hunger, for they also overcome the whole of a person; so He says 'caused it to taste,' because taste is the most powerful of the senses. The phrase 'of His' here means of Allah's, that is directly, without any intermediary means. Or, it means that He replaces their affliction with mercy and gives them relief from affliction in the form of mercy. Also, although taste can mean a strong reaction upon receiving something, it can also mean subtle, muted consumption, as is the case when we taste food, or when we say, 'By Allah, I have not tasted a thing from so-and-so', that is we have never eaten a thing at his house.

So the True Lord *the Almighty* speaks here of mercy as being tasted because the mercy that exists in this world does not comprise the totality of His mercy; only a small part of it exists in this world, whilst most of it is in the Hereafter.

Notice also that Allah *the Almighty* says here '... lo and behold! – some of them ascribe partners to their Lord' (*ar-Rum*: 33), whilst in the other verse He says: 'And so, when they embark on a ship [and find themselves in danger], they call unto Allah, [at that moment] sincere in their faith in Him alone; but as soon as He has brought them safe ashore, they [begin to] ascribe to imaginary powers a share in His divinity' (*al-'Ankabut*: 65). So why did He say 'some of them' in this verse, whilst in the other He said '...they ascribe to imaginary powers a share in His divinity' (*al-'Ankabut*: 65) without excepting any of them? Scholars say it is because the first verse speaks of those who call upon Allah on dry land; people on dry land tend to differ from one another and they include the pious and the iniquitous, the obedient and the disobedient. So they differ in their responses, so when the believers were given grace and mercy from Allah, they said, 'Praise be to Allah, who has saved us!' whilst the idolaters returned to their disbelief and stubbornness.

As for the other verse, it describes those who call upon Allah at sea; and it is usual that a group of people sailing together will be of similar character. They are not sailing in order to travel, but rather for pleasure, similar to how some people buy yachts or sailboats and gather their followers and like-minded friends. It is clear that in such a case they will be united in the things they love, and will be of a single school of thought, and a single way of life. So as long as they were at sea, this means that they must all have been equal in their recalcitrance and idolatry, and in their abandonment of Allah the moment they were safe from harm, which is why He used the phrase here 'as soon as...', suggesting immediacy, and used it in the other verse, saying: '...they [begin to] ascribe to imaginary powers a share in His divinity' (*al-'Ankabut*: 65). After Allah saved them, they rushed back to the idolatry they had held to before.

So in this verse, the True Lord *the Almighty* shows us the true nature of man, and his anxiousness to bring himself benefit, and the way he allows the good that Allah gives him to make him reckless and wanton, as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Nay, verily, man becomes grossly overweening [6] whenever he believes himself to be self-sufficient [7]' (*al-'Alaq*: 6-7).

Yet he has no choice but to turn to his Lord when He deprives him of all the material means to benefit, causes him to fear for his self and his soul which never benefitted from the signs Allah placed in the universe so that it will return to the protecting security of Allah; and so He sends him an affliction which negates all the means he has employed in the way of wantonness, evil and tyranny.

Yet he does not give himself up to the affliction which threatens him, but rather remembers that he has a Lord he can turn to. He finds no refuge except with Him because he knows that the ones who took him away from Allah so that he believed in them and disbelieved in Allah cannot help him in any way because instead of worshipping Allah Alone he has worshipped gods which can neither help nor harm. This is why Allah *the Almighty* says: 'and whenever danger befalls you at sea, all those [powers] that you are wont to invoke forsake you, [and nothing remains for you] save Him...' (*al-Isra'*: 67). Those you call upon do not know how to get to you, and even if they did know they could never reach you; yet as for Me, I am your Lord, and I know you best, and I can help you, and show you mercy.

So these idolaters associate partners with Allah in times of ease, yet in times of difficulty and strife they do not deceive and cheat themselves, they do not call upon idols because they know that these idols cannot hear them or answer them, so they are no good to them and no one can save them but the True Allah. Necessity forces them to recognise Him and call upon Him.

Then, the True Lord *the Almighty* says:

لِيَكْفُرُوا بِمَا ءَاتَيْنَاهُمْ فَتَمَتَّعُوا فَسَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

Showing no gratitude for what We have given them. 'Take your pleasure! You will come to know' [34] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 34)

The first thing that comes to mind is that the word 'to' here in the phrase 'to show no gratitude' (*ar-Rum*: 34) implies a cause, or a reason, meaning that what comes after it is the reason for what comes before it, as when you say, 'Study to succeed.' This is like a conditional sentence, where you say 'if you study you will succeed', so the ultimate success is the motivation for the study.

But does the verse make sense if understood in this way? Did Allah save them and give them a taste of His Mercy in order that they could show ingratitude to Him? We say: a cause is not the reason for its effect, as people who view language superficially might think, but rather, the effect is the reason for the cause; they do not differentiate between a motive and an actual cause. The student studies because he thinks of success, the benefits it will bring, and so he studies. So the effect is the justification for the cause here, that is, a motivation for it; if you want to refer to the actual causality, you should consider the cause first, then the effect.

If you say, 'I got into the car to go to Alexandria', this does not mean that the act of getting into the car was the whole reason for your going to Alexandria; rather, you wanted to go first so you got into the car. Once you had done so, you did indeed go there. So we say that the effect creates the cause from the point of view of motive, whilst the cause creates the effect from the point of view of actual causality.

So here, Allah saved them from harm and let them taste of His mercy not in order that they will show Him ingratitude, but rather to show them that there is no safety for them except with Him so that they will cling fast to Him *the Almighty*. The disbelievers among them will believe, and the believers among them will increase their faith. But their reaction is the opposite of this: they disbelieve in Allah. And so the meaning of the word 'to' here is that their ungrateful disbelief was the outcome which followed the safety and mercy they were given.

To illustrate this (and Allah is beyond compare), suppose you were to take an orphan child into your care and raise them well, and then when he grew up he defied you, and treated you poorly. You might say to people, 'I raised him, only for him to treat me badly.' This means, 'I raised him to love and respect me, but things did not turn out that way.' This indicates the false evaluation of the one who raised the child, and the bad nature of the one who was raised.

The phrase 'To show no gratitude...' (*ar-Rum*: 34) here could also imply a rebuke because what comes after 'to' is not the true reason for what came before, but rather the true reason was the exact opposite of this. He gave them

to taste His Mercy, and saved them in order that they would believe, or increase in faith, but all they did was disbelieve again.

This issue is alluded to many times in the Quran such as His words in the story of Prophet Moses (Musa): 'and [some of] Pharaoh's household found [and spared] him: for [We had willed] that he becomes an enemy unto them and [a source of] grief...' (*al-Qasas*: 8).

It is clear that actually they took him in to be a source of joy for themselves. If they had known what the outcome would be they would have drowned him or slain him as they slew the other children of the Israelites. As they say in the popular expression, 'He raised his own executioner.' This showed that the one who took him in had no idea what would happen, it also shows that he was foolish. How could the one who was killing children at this very time not have doubts about a boy who came to him in a box floating in the sea? Was this not a sign that his family had tried to save him from being killed? But, as Allah *the Almighty* says: '...know that Allah intervenes⁽¹⁾ between man and [the desires of] his heart...' (*al-Anfal*: 24). So you are in the midst of slaying children because of a vision your soothsayers gave you; yet the very child you fear will come to your door and you will raise him in your household and the end of your kingdom will come by his hand – so do not think you can plot against Allah.

So the story also shows the failure of Pharaoh and his soothsayers. If you believe the soothsayers about what they told you, what use will killing children be, when you will never know who will be the cause of the loss of your sovereignty and you will never catch him? Why do you bother with such comprehensive measures, then?

One should consider such matters in light of the fact that one has a Lord; and the Lord is able to make His enemy create an enemy of his own to defeat him. He is the best of planners and the successful plan should be so subtle that its object has no way of sensing it.

The state in which we find ourselves in the 20th century, however, allows us to say that 'truthfulness is the 20th century's best plot', that is, if someone

(1) That is, Allah can turn a man's heart and change his intention as He wills since a man does not own his heart but rather, Allah owns it. (*Al-Qamus Al-Qawim*, i. 179)

wants to plot, he should simply tell the truth and be direct. These days it is rare to find people telling the truth and being straightforward to the point that if you tell people the truth, they will suspect you and find it far-fetched that what you say could be true. It is as if a person says to those who wish to kill him, 'I will go to such-and-such place at such-and-such time.' They will think he is trying to deceive them, even if he tells them the truth about where he will be.

After Moses (Musa), had been raised in the household of Pharaoh, given Message by his Lord and had gone to Pharaoh to call him to Allah, Pharaoh said to him:" "Did we not raise you among us as a child, and you remained among us for years of your life?"' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 18) Yes, you raised me as a child, but the one who truly raised me and raised you was the One Who sent me here to you and I will obey the Highest One Who raised me before I obey you. This is a sign that the care of Allah is the basis for raising those you love; so do not say, 'I raised my son until he became such-and-such', but rather seek the means to upbringing and leave Allah to do the real raising. This is the concept alluded to by the poet who said:

If your children are not given Divine care,
Your hopes will be dashed, and your wishes denied;
For the Moses raised by Gabriel disbelieved,
Whilst the Moses raised by Pharaoh was a Prophet

Allah *the Almighty* then says: '...take your pleasure! You will come to know' (*ar-Rum*: 34). This is because they disbelieved in order to gain the profane enjoyments of this worldly life, for faith has some hard demands that weigh heavy on the soul. It requires that you do things that are difficult for your ego to bear and forbids you the things you love. As for the idols they worshipped instead of Allah, and the other false gods, they asked for nothing and revealed no way.

But these are only the enjoyments of this worldly life, and the delights of this worldly life are scant because this world only lasts as long as you are alive in it, so do not say that it lasts from prophet Adam until the end of time; this long period of time has nothing to do with you – all that concerns you is however long you live within it.

However long a person lives in this world, it is a short life and its enjoyments are scant. Moreover, it can only be presumed that this short life will continue and it is not guaranteed. Death might come to you at any moment; and when a person dies, it is as though his Resurrection Day has come.⁽¹⁾ So the True Lord *the Almighty* made death ambiguous, and made its time different for everyone: this one dies before he is born, this one dies as a child, this one as a young man, and so on. The ambiguity of the time, cause, and place of death is a clear message because it makes death a reality for all of us that we must expect at any moment, and so prepare for it.

Notice here that the Quran adds an imperative verb 'Take your pleasure' to a present tense verb 'to show ingratitude', whilst elsewhere it says: 'and thus they show utter ingratitude for all that We have vouchsafed them, and go on [thoughtlessly] enjoying their worldly life...' (*al-'Ankabut*: 66).

In this case, the enjoyment is not subject to an imperative verb, but is rather subject to causality: 'and thus they show utter ingratitude', 'and go on enjoying their worldly life'. So there is a difference of opinion over the particle *lam* preceding this verb in the Arabic, as to whether it implies the imperative or causality. Here in the verse in question of the chapter of *ar-Rum*, the saying of Allah: 'but in time you will come to know' comes after 'enjoy, then, your [brief] life' (*ar-Rum*: 34), while in the chapter of *al-A'nkabut*, this word 'enjoy' comes after 'to show ingratitude...' (*al-'Ankabut*: 66). It is thus as if He *the Almighty* is saying, 'Disbelieve, and enjoy your lives; but you will find out the consequence of this.'

The reason they say that the *lam* here is for causality is that it is marked by the *kasra* 'short vowel' which is usually used for the causal meaning. But those who understand the verse properly say that since the imperative verb 'enjoy, then, your [brief] life' is added on to this present tense verb preceded

(1) *Ad-Daylami relates this Hadith in his (Musnad) (1117) on the authority of Anas with the wording: 'When one of you dies, his Resurrection has begun.' 'Ajluni said in Kashf Al-Khafa' (2618): 'It was related that Anas said: 'Remember death much, for if you remember it at times of wealth, it will make it seem scant; and if you remember it at times of poverty, it will make it seem like affluence. Death is the Resurrection, and when one of you dies his Resurrection has begun, and he sees the good and evil which he possesses.'*

by the particle *lam*, the *lam* must also imply the meaning of an imperative because it is immediately connected to an imperative verb, which is used here as a warning.

But why then is the *lam* marked by the *kasra* vowel, when usually it would have no vowel? One of the grammarians said that this is also permissible, and demonstrated this by reference to this verse: 'and thus they show utter ingratitude for all that We have vouchsafed them, and go on [thoughtlessly] enjoying their worldly life...' (*al-'Ankabut*: 66) in which both verbs are imperatives preceded by *lam* marked with *kasra*.)

To those who say that the verbs in this verse are actually both preceded by the *lam* of causality, we say: If you hear it as a *lam* of causality, be aware that in that case it is actually the *lam* of consequence because their disbelief and enjoyment of this life was not the cause of His letting them taste His mercy.

As for those who say it is the imperative *lam* in both cases, they will ask you why it is marked with *kasra*. Yet in the Quran there are plenty of examples to prove that it can indeed be marked with *kasra*, such as: 'Hence, [O Muhammad,] proclaim thou unto all people the [duty of] pilgrimage: they will come unto thee on foot and on every [kind of] fast mount, coming from every far-away point [on earth], [27] so that they might experience much that shall be of benefit to them...[28]' (*al-Hajj*: 27-28). The *lam* here is marked with *kasra* because it implies causality. Then, He says: 'Thereafter let them bring to an end their state of self-denial, and let them fulfil the vows which they [may] have made, and let them walk [once again] around the Most Ancient Temple' (*al-Hajj*: 29). All instances of *lam* here have no vowel because they imply the imperative.

Yet in another verse, both kinds of *lam* occur: 'let him who has ample means spend in accordance with his amplitude...' (*at-Talaq*: 7). So the first *lam* is marked with a *kasra* because it is at the beginning of the sentence. In Arabic a sentence cannot begin without a vowel on its first letter, and so the purpose of the *kasra* is to prevent this. He *the Almighty* then says: 'and let him whose means of subsistence are scanty spend in accordance with what Allah has given him...' (*at-Talaq*: 7), so the imperative *lam* has no vowel because it is in the middle of the sentence.

So those who write the Quranic text must be aware of this matter and must know that the Word of Allah is all-conquering. The people who write the texts have in some cases forgotten that the Quran is considered to be linked from beginning to end, without any pauses and that even when we come to the end, it should be connected back to the beginning without a pause, so we say: 'who whispers in the hearts of men [5] from all [temptation to evil by] invisible forces as well as men [6]' (*an-Nas*: 6), 'In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy' (*al-Fatiha*: 1). The end of the Quran is therefore connected to its beginning so that it will never end. Bearing this in mind, the first verb of: 'let him who has ample means spend in accordance with his amplitude...' (*at-Talaq*: 7) should not be marked with a *kasra* since it is connected with what comes before it.

The phrase 'but in time you will come to know' is general, and includes the whole future, both short and long-term. It includes those who would die immediately after hearing it and those who would die a long time after.

Then, the True Lord *the Almighty* says:

أَمْ أَنْزَلْنَاهُمْ عَلَيْهِمْ سُلْطَانًا فَهُوَ يَتَكَلَّمُ بِمَا كَانُوا بِهِ يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

Did We send them down any authority that sanctions the partners they ascribe to God? [35]
(The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 35)

The word 'or' does not usually come at the start of a sentence because it is a conjunction used to separate two alternatives, like when you say, 'Did Zayd come, or 'Umar?' So it must come between two contrasting things. The approximation of this is therefore: 'Do they follow their own desires, or has a scripture been sent down to them to sanction their idolatry?' Since no book has come down to them to sanction their practises, the only alternative remaining is that they are following their own desires.

The phrase 'send them down...' (*ar-Rum*: 35) implies that the one who sends is higher, and the one who receives is lower. This takes place between the heights of divinity and the depths of divinity. We ourselves do not see this descent, rather, the one who received the Quran for the first time by direct revelation is the one who saw it and then informed us of it.

The root of revelation is that it comes from Allah. When Allah sends revelation down to us, He does so in order to give us a small fraction of this loftiness; whether it be a metaphorical loftiness, for He is not in a single place; or a physical loftiness, as is the case with His saying: '...and We bestowed [upon you] from on high [the ability to make use of] iron, in which there is awesome power as well as [a source of] benefits for man...' (*al-Hadid*: 25). The word for 'authority' here is *sultan* which is derived from the verb meaning 'to control' or 'to have power over'. This indicates power and strength, whether the power of strong arguments and proofs, for he who defeats you with arguments and proofs is more powerful than you; or the power of compulsion and coercion, such as someone who forces you to do something against your will, unlike the power of argument, which convinces you to do it willingly.

If we look into the word *sultan*, we find that Allah *the Almighty* tells us Satan will use this word in the Hereafter when he absolves himself of those who followed him: '...Yet I had no power at all over you: I but called you – and you responded unto me. Hence, blame not me, but blame yourselves...' (*Ibrahim*: 22). That is, 'I had no power to capture your hearts with arguments and proofs and I had no power to compel you and coerce your hearts. In reality, you were all ready and waiting and all I had to do was call you and you came, eager to obey me freely.'

This concept explains something in the Quran that people have been wondering about and discussing for a long time – whether with good intentions or ill – which is that Allah *the Almighty* is reported once as saying to Satan: '...What has kept thee from prostrating thyself...' (*Sad*: 75), whilst elsewhere He is reported as saying: '...What has kept thee from prostrating thyself...' (*al-A'raf*: 12). (The difference in Arabic is the addition of the particle *la* in the second case, so literally it reads 'What has prevented thee, that thou dost not prostrate thyself...'). It is that the former refers to the power of compulsion, as though he wanted to prostrate but something prevented him from doing so, whilst the latter refers to the power of argumentation, so he did not prostrate out of willingness, and conviction that it was correct not to do so.⁽¹⁾

(1) Scholar Zakariyah Al-Ansari says that actually the addition of the *la* serves to emphasise the negation of the prostration, but that the meaning is no different.

Allah's word: 'that sanctions the partners they ascribe to Allah?' (*ar-Rum*: 35) means that this alleged divine writ would tell them what to associate with Allah, commanding them to do such-and-such, but that all these commands would be in line with their own desires.

Then, the True Lord *the Almighty* says:

وَلِذَا أَذَقْنَا النَّاسَ رَحْمَةً فَرِحُوا بِهَا وَإِنْ تُصِيبَهُمْ
سَيِّئَةٌ يُمَاقِدَمَتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ إِذَا هُمْ يَقْنَطُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

**When We give people a taste of Our blessing,
they rejoice, but when something bad happens to
them – because of their own actions – they fall
into utter despair [36] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 36)**

It is good that people rejoice and celebrate Allah's Blessing, but why, when evil befalls them as a result of their own actions, do they despair? The source of the blessing was the same as that of the evil, but they rejoiced in the former because they saw it as good and they despaired in the latter because they saw it as bad. They should have known that it is all from Allah and that there is wisdom behind His blessings and the trials He sends, too.

So you remembered one thing but ignored the other: you remembered the mercy you received, and the tribulations, but you forgot about who made this mercy and this tribulation. If you had linked the mercy and the tribulation with their Maker, you would see that He was Wise in making them both. The problem with people is that they separate destiny from the One Who destines it. So you should not consider the event itself, but rather the One Who made it.

If your son comes to you crying because someone has hit him, the first thing you say is, 'Who did it?' If he tells you it was so-and-so, you say, 'Yes, he hates us and wants to hurt us,' but if he tells you it was his uncle, you say, 'You must have done something to make him angry, or you behaved badly so he punished you.'

So you do not consider the event itself, but rather, you made a link between the event and the one who caused it: if it was an enemy, it is clear he intended evil; if it was a loved one, it is clear he intended good.

Henceforth, we should make a link between things and their makers. If the maker is our Lord, we must search for the wisdom behind it. We will not talk about mercy because its benefit is plain for all to see; but let us discuss the tribulations that make people grieve so that they despair and lose hope.

We say: if you were to consider who it was that sent it to you, you would rest assured, and be at peace because *musiba* (an affliction) means anything that afflicts you, whether it is good or bad, as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Whatever good happens to thee is from Allah; and whatever evil befalls thee is from thyself...' (*an-Nisa'*: 79).

So an affliction is not inherently bad, but the results of it can be. The fact that the word used here for both 'happen' and 'befall' is *asaba*, literally 'to hit' means that it is like an arrow which has been shot at you. It will certainly reach you and will not miss, for the One Who fired it is a God and a Wise Lord. If it is a good thing, it will come to you without your having to exert yourself, or compete with others over it; and if it is a trial, beware of saying, 'I will prepare for it and defend myself from it' because you cannot hope to avoid it.

But why should you despair and lose hope if a tribulation affects you? Why do you not wait and see if there is any wisdom behind it, or some good that you cannot see now? Perhaps that which is difficult now has for it relief lying in store in the near future. Read His word: '...but it may well be that you hate a thing the while it is good for you, and it may well be that you love a thing the while it is bad for you...' (*al-Baqara*: 216).

We all remember the event that happened here with the 'building of death' when they fired the doorman and his family and he took the matter to court; then after the building had collapsed, the doorman and his family found that what they had thought was evil and tribulation was actually a good thing.

So do not despair because of harm that befalls you. You should know that it was your Lord that sent it to you, and that there is wisdom behind it, so wait until it is revealed to you. No one despairs except he who has no lord to turn to.

Let us discuss the tribulations which cause people to despair: Did you have something to do with it, or did you have nothing to do with it? If you had something to do with it, like the student who neglects his studies and so fails the test, you should accept this tribulation gladly because failure helps you to correct your mistakes and alerts you to your negligence so you can fix it and try harder.

If you had nothing to do with the tribulation, like the one who studies and works hard but does not succeed because he gets sick the night before the exam, or has an accident, we say: Beware of separating the tribulation from its source and its Maker, but rather reflect on the good that comes from it. Do not separate the tribulation from the One Who sent it to you, and do not despair. Search for your Lord's wisdom in sending you this tribulation, like the mother who says to her son: 'My son, you always do well, and the people envy you because of it, so perhaps your failure this time will put an end to their jealousy of you and save you from their evil eyes, so they will leave you alone.' His father might say to him, 'Son, be easy on yourself; perhaps if you had passed this year you would not have attained the grade that you wanted, so this is an opportunity for you to become stronger and get the top grade.' So do not rule out that there could be a benefit behind the tribulation because your Lord is All Sustaining and He wants nothing but good for you.

So if you reflect on things you will find that some people are wrongfully accused and convicted for things of which they are innocent, falling victim to false testimony or a capricious judge and so on. Because your Lord, however, is All Sustaining, and aware of all things, He will make it up to this oppressed person and say to them: 'You now have a mark in My account. You were wrongfully accused, and so I will forgive you for those wrongful things which you did do, and save you from being punished for them. And as for you who were blind to justice, and gave false testimony, or took what was not yours, or escaped punishment: I will cause you to take the blame for a crime you did not commit.'

So there is no place for despair when tribulations come, and if you link the tribulation to its Maker you will see that He is Wise, and He must have a

wise reason for doing it which is unknown to you now, but which you will come to understand if you reflect on the matter.

When we consider the rhetorical style of the verse, we find that there are several contrasts. When speaking of mercy, He says: 'When We give people a taste of Our blessing, they rejoice...' (*ar-Rum*: 36) using the conditional particle *idha* 'when'. But when speaking of tribulation, He says: '...but if something bad happens to them – because of their own actions – they fall into utter despair' (*ar-Rum*: 36) using the particle *in* 'if'. Why did He change from using 'when' to using 'if'? They say that when you compare the blessings and tribulations that come to man in his worldly life, you find that the blessings are manifold and the tribulations scant. Allah's blessings are constantly visiting you every moment beyond all reckoning, whilst the tribulations could be counted on one's fingers.

And so for blessings He uses the word 'when' which implies certainty, and for tribulations He uses the word 'if' which implies possibility. Another example of this is Allah's word: 'When Allah's succour comes, and victory' (*an-Nasr*: 1). He used 'when' here because it implies certainty, and confirms that victory will come; and on the other hand He said: 'And if any of those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Allah seeks thy protection, grant him protection...' (*at-Tawba*: 6).

Notice also that the verse does not mention the reason He gives them to taste of His mercy, but does mention the reason he sends them afflictions: 'because of their own actions' (*ar-Rum*: 36). This shows His justice when it comes to the sending of afflictions and His grace when it comes to mercy because mercy is from Allah and all blessings are graces from Allah.

So in the case of tribulation, He says: 'because of their own actions' mentioning the cause so that no one would think that Allah sends tribulations to His slaves unjustly. Rather, it is because of what their hands wrought and so the matter proceeds according to Divine Justice.

There is a wide gap between grace and justice. If two rivals ask you to judge between them, you say, 'should I judge between you with justice, or with something better than justice?' they will say, 'Is there anything better than justice?' So we all want justice, but be careful, because justice only gives

you your rights, whilst grace excuses you the rights you owe.⁽¹⁾ It is as though the True Lord *the Almighty* were saying to us: ‘Do not think that you will be saved by your works; rather, you will be saved by My grace: ‘Say: “In [this] bounty of Allah and in His grace – in this, then, let them rejoice: it is better than all [the worldly wealth] that they may amass!”’ (Yunus: 58) That is, however many good deeds you amass, it will not be enough and you will not be saved except by Allah’s Mercy and Grace.

The True Lord *the Almighty* wants us to know that His Mercy encompasses everything. Despite the many favours and uncountable blessings with which He has showered us, He only punishes us for the things we do that deserve punishment because He is a Wise, Merciful Lord.

As long as this is so, consider the effects of your Lord’s mercy in the universe; reflect on His blessings and consider the precision of the wording when Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘...And should you try to count Allah’s blessings, you could never compute them...’ (*Ibrahim*: 34). Counting necessitates plurality, but the word *ni‘mat* here literally means ‘blessing’ in the singular form; so how do we count it, Lord? They say that indeed it is a single blessing, but within it are other blessings, and if you examined it you would find that the good that flows from it is beyond reckoning or computing.

The verse uses the word *inn*, meaning ‘should’ or ‘if’ which indicates doubt and low probability because it is not possible to count these blessings, but even if you tried to count them you would not be able to. With the advances of science, and the existence of colleges dedicated to the study of statistics, producing for us statistics and counting all kinds of things in our lives, they could never presume to enumerate Allah’s blessings. Why not? It is because you only begin to count something if you believe it can be counted; if it is beyond your capability to do so, you would not presume to try and count it, just as no one has tried to count the number of grains of sand in the desert. So Allah *the Almighty* shows the

(1) It means that it decreases them, as the Noble Quran says: ‘...and never will He let your [good] deeds go to waste’ (*Muhammad*: 35) that is, He will not decrease any of your reward. What this means is that a verdict of justice gives both adversaries their right; as for grace, the one who judges might see the virtue, high aspiration, and nobility of one of them and therefore decrease his right because he knows that his intelligence, conviction, and mercy are greater. Allah knows best.

unlikely of our being able to count them by saying 'and should you try to count'; it is something implausible, which will never happen.

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ
 إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

**Do they not see that God gives abundantly to whoever
 He will and sparingly [to whoever He will]? There
 truly are signs in this for those who believe [37]
 (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 37)**

'Gives abundantly' means to give a lot, and 'gives... sparingly' means to give a little. This means: Do they not see this, and how to one person Allah gives much provision, whilst to another He gives little. Perhaps the one who has a lot did not even work for it, but rather inherited it, whilst the one who has little works hard and strives, yet his means are meagre. The philosophers responded to this situation according to the presence or lack of faith in their hearts; so the atheist Ibn Ar-Rawindi said:

How many wise men have seen their works fail?

Whilst the ignorant one is well-sustained;

This is what leaves the mind perplexed,

And turns the skilled scholar into a heretic

So one of those whose heart is filled with faith responded to him:

How many wise men have lived in hardship?

And how many fools have lived in ease;

The people were baffled, and so I said to them:

'This proves the existence of Divine Decree.'

The world does not run in a firmly mechanical way, but rather by means of the sustenance of its Creator *the Almighty*. Bear in mind that abundance is for those to whom Allah gives, and scarcity is for those from whom Allah withholds. Do not separate the act from the Doer *the Almighty* and remember that Allah is One; All His slaves are equal before Him, yet He gives plenty to some and little to others.

So there must be some wisdom behind both of these states. If we look into the results of this wealth and this poverty, the wisdom will become clear to us.

Have you never seen someone who is blessed with much wealth and comfort, yet is unable even to raise his own children because their comfortable position in life has led them to misguidance and made their careers fail? On the other side, do we not see poor men who live in meagre circumstances watch their children rise above them, and gain better-paid jobs? So, He '...gives abundantly to whomever He will and sparingly [to whomever He will] ' (*ar-Rum*: 37) according to His Wisdom.

We mentioned before that there are two schools of atheist thought in Germany, one associated with Goebel and the other with the Butcher. One of them denies that the world has any God and says that if the world was created by a Wise God, there would be no blind people or disabled people and so on. Wisdom in creation necessitates (in their view) that all creatures be equal and so they take the abnormalities of creation as a proof of their atheism.

The other school says that the universe has no God – it moves in a monotonous, mechanical way – if there were a Creator, He would have created the universe in many different forms, and His will would be free of any mechanism. So, they take the order of the universe as a proof of their atheism, contradicting the previous view. So in reality, they simply want to be atheists in any way they can, and so they use a flawed argument to serve as ‘proof’ of the belief to which they adhere.

In answer to the first argument which takes the existence of abnormalities as a proof of the absence of a wise Allah, we say: The abnormalities you mention exist in individuals who make up for one another’s defects; for every one blind man there are millions of fully-sighted people, so the presence of this tiny proportion does not break the general rule of creation, nor does it affect human life; for the sound make up for the unsound.

As for the orderly system which the second school cites as proof, we say that if you consider the higher spheres of existence, the macrocosm of suns, moons and stars, you will see absolute order because if these things were to break their order the entire universe would come to ruin. So, Allah created them in absolute order without any abnormalities.

In the order of the universe we find stability, whilst in the sphere of individuals who are free of need of one another, we find abnormalities and differences. So the stable things confirm the stability of Allah's power and the differences confirm its omnipotent all-possibility.

So for those who desire an orderly system as a proof of faith, the system exists. For those who desire exceptions to the rule as a proof of faith, the exceptions exist; all you have to do is agree, share your ideas with each other and you will find the truth.

The issue of sustenance has its own philosophy in Islam. The True Lord *the Almighty* informs us that He is the Provider, sometimes providing by material means and sometimes without them. Do not be deluded by material means, for you might utilise them, still receive no provision and your work might come to nothing, like the farmer who uses all the means at his disposal until the crops are almost ready. Then a disaster comes and the crops fail. So do not be deluded by means, but rather keep in mind the Creator of all means *the Almighty*.

We said before that you should use the means at your disposal and then not worry about anything else, because your Creator who called you into existence, has undertaken to do the rest. A poet once expressed this by saying:

Seek provision with its means,
Then think not on it further,
You might not know where it dwells,
But your provision knows where to find you.

Then He *the Almighty* says: '...There truly are signs in this for those who believe' (*ar-Rum*: 37). He said 'for those who believe' because this notion of sustenance requires faith in the wisdom of the Provider *the Almighty* in His giving and withholding.

Concerning the rhetorical style of the verse, notice that Allah *the Almighty* says '...to whomever He will...' (*ar-Rum*: 37) after mentioning abundant giving, and then after mentioning scant giving says simply '... and sparingly [to whomever He will]' (*ar-Rum*: 37). He is not saying 'unto whomever He wills' this time. This is because we humans consider abundant provision as a

good thing in which we rejoice, and for which we hope, and so He says '...to whomever He will...' (*ar-Rum*: 37) to reassure us that we will be amongst those He gives to in abundance; whilst in the case of giving scantily, He does not say 'to whomever' in order to keep it ambiguous, and something that we all hope will not apply to us.

Then, the True Lord *the Almighty* says:

فَاتِ ذَا الْقُرْبَىٰ حَقَّهُ، وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَابْنَ السَّبِيلِ ذَٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ لِّلَّذِينَ
 يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَ اللَّهِ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

So give their due to the near relative, the needy, and the wayfarer – that is best for those whose goal is God's approval: these are the ones who will prosper [38]
(The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 38)

If we reflect on the flow of the Quranic discourse here, we find that Allah mentioned firstly abundant provision, then scant provision and then immediately emphasised the rights of near kin, the needy and wayfarers. It is as though He were alerting us to the fact that these rights are not only incumbent on those who have been given abundant provision, but rather that they apply to everyone; even those who have their own needs and whose provision is scant, should not forget about these people.

And so Allah *the Almighty* ends the verse by saying '...and the wayfarer – that is best for those whose goal is Allah's approval these are the ones who will prosper' (*ar-Rum*: 38). Everyone, whether rich or poor, seeks Allah's Countenance.

Compare this verse to the verse about obligatory alms: 'The offerings given for the sake of Allah are [meant] only for the poor and the needy and those who are in charge thereof and those whose hearts are to be won over and for the freeing of human beings from bondage and [for] those who are overburdened with debts and [for every struggle] in Allah's cause and [for] the wayfarer: [this is] an ordinance from Allah – and Allah is all-knowing, wise' (*at-Tawba*: 60).

Unlike the verse we are discussing, (*ar-Rum*: 38), the near kin are not mentioned in the above verse. It is as though the verse attracts attention to the fact that it is incorrect to give our near kin money that is intended for obligatory

alms. This is a mistake that many rich people make, even the religiously committed ones amongst them. Very often, someone asks, 'I have a cousin or a relative; can I pay some of my obligatory alms to him?' I used to answer those people, 'By Allah, if your cousin knows that you are giving him the money from your obligatory alms, he will not accept it because the relative has a right to be helped, whether you are rich enough to afford to pay the obligatory alms or you do not own enough to have to pay it.'

So do not connect these three – the near kin, the needy and the wayfarer – with the obligatory alms here because they have a right even over the poor person who does not possess the minimum amount of wealth which obligates the obligatory alms and over those who have scant provision.

Despite this duty, which the Sacred Law emphasises, we find many people usurping the right of their relatives and trying to prevent them from getting it. For example, some people do not have any male children, so register all their possessions in the name of their daughters so as to prevent their uncles or cousins from inheriting from them when they die, even though a daughter inherits half the legacy and two daughters inherit two-thirds and the other third goes to the uncles or cousins. This is because in this situation, the daughters do not have any male relations to protect them, so the Sacred Law gives this right to the uncles and cousins.

Allah *the All Wise Lawgiver* treats all sides fairly, giving to you and taking from you; so why, when the father dies leaving these daughters behind him and they have no inheritance, do they then demand that the paternal cousin or uncle support them and take them to court – why do we deny them their rights and then demand our own rights? This is a kind of wilful ignorance.

Why do we not give to the paternal uncle or cousin, who will protect the daughters and do all he can to keep them secure and stand by their side when they are in dire need?

Beware, then, of including your relatives in the obligatory alms you give, or linking their aid with your ability because they have a right over you whether you are going through easy times or hard times.

It is enough that Allah *the Almighty* singled them out by saying 'the near relative' (*ar-Rum*: 38) and did not say 'those of need' or 'farers of the way';

the word ‘of’ *dhu* here means ‘possessor of’ an indication of constant and fixed possession. We do not say that a person is ‘a man of knowledge’ if he only knows one or two things, but only if he is characterised by broad knowledge which he has mastered. Likewise, we do not say that someone is ‘a man of good character’ unless good character is a constant attribute of his from which he never departs.

In the same way, we say that someone is a ‘near relative’, that is, he is attached to you and can never be removed from you. So you must attend to the rights he has over you and give him his share, even if you do not possess the minimum for the obligatory alms. The same is the case for the needy and the wayfarer, since Allah mentioned them together outside the context of the obligatory alms which indicates that they have a right other than the obligatory alms.

We can observe that the Quran ordered them according to their importance and need: the first of them is the relative because of his fixed nearness to you. Then comes the needy person who is local and known to you. Then follows the wayfarer who passes through so you see him one day and then never see him again and he must be considered according to his present situation. The status of the needy person might change and Allah might make it so that he receives abundant provision and the wayfarer might return home. So the fixed attribute is that of the near of kin, which is why Allah described them in a way which indicates this permanence.

He then says ‘and the wayfarer’ (*ar-Rum*: 38); so his due is obligatory for him and he has the first right to it. This is why He did not say, for example, ‘And give the near of kin his due and the needy and the wayfarer their dues.’

They gave an example of this by saying, ‘The ruler said, “Let so-and-so enter and so-and-so and so-and-so.”’ The permission to enter was given to the first one and then it followed for the others.

So these three kinds of people have a special status since Allah has commanded you to give them some of your own meat and not just link them with the obligatory alms or simple provision. As for the other seven categories of people who have a right to the obligatory alms, He did not oblige you to give them anything except the obligatory alms.

When there was a debate amongst the scholars about the meaning of *miskin* 'needy' and *faqir* 'poor' and which of them is the neediest, they said that a 'needy' person means someone who possesses something, but it is not enough to suffice him.⁽¹⁾ Abu Hanifa *Allah be pleased with him* adduced this definition by citing Allah's words: 'As for that boat, it belonged to some needy people who toiled upon the sea...' (*al-Kahf*: 79). So He affirmed that they owned something and called them 'needy'. As for *faqir* 'the poor person', this is the person who has nothing at all. According to this understanding, the poor person is even needier than the needy person, which means that he is included in this verse *a fortiori*.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'This', that is to give to these people 'is best...' The Arabic word *khayr* 'best' can be used linguistically to mean one of two things: Sometimes it means 'good' the opposite of 'evil', as in Allah's words: 'And so, he who shall have done an atom's weight of good, shall behold it; [7] and he who shall have done an atom's weight of evil, shall behold it [8]' (*az-Zalzala*: 7-8).

Other times, when we say *khayr* we mean 'best' meaning the Arabic comparative/superlative form, as when the poet said:

Zayd is the best of people and the son of the best.

But the word *khayr* is most often used to mean 'best' or 'better', as when the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'The strong believer is *khayr* 'better' and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer. There is good (*khayr*) in both.'⁽²⁾ So the first use of the word *khayr* here means 'better'. But for whom is it best?

It is '...for those whose goal is Allah's approval...' (*ar-Rum*: 38). That is, by giving what is due to the near of kin, the needy and the wayfarer, one

(1) *Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him narrated that the Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: 'The needy person is not the one who goes around like this asking the people, who give him a morsel or two and a date or two.' They said, 'Then who is the needy person, O Messenger of Allah?' He said, 'The one who finds no wealthy man to enrich him and no one notices him and so gives charity to him and he asks nothing of the people.'* Narrated by *Al-Bukhari* in his *Sahih* (4539) and by *Muslim* in his *Sahih* (1039), in *Kitab az-zakat*; and the wording here is that of *Muslim*

(2) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad* (ii. 366/370), *Muslim in his Sahih* (2664) and *Ibn Majah in his Sunnan* (79) on the authority of *Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him*

seeks the countenance of Allah and does not seek to be seen or heard by others. The one who does a good deed takes his reward from those for whom he does it. Whoever works sincerely for Allah will be rewarded from Allah and whoever works so the people will see and hear him and praise him can take his reward from them.

These are the ones whom Allah *the Almighty* describes by saying: ‘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) That is, he will be surprised by the existence of a god who was not on his mind at all and for whom he did not work.

So the meaning of ‘for those whose goal is Allah’s approval’ is that when they act, they seek Allah’s countenance, regardless of whether anyone sees what they do, or they conceal their act so that their left hand does not know what their right hand does. This is because the whole matter is based on intention. You might give to others in front of the people whilst your intention is that they follow your example, or to stop them from speaking ill of you and slandering you.

But when you give publicly with a pure intention for Allah, it is an act of charity which will produce giving and produce reward, because you will thereby be a good example for others to give and you will be rewarded the same as they will. Whoever establishes a good practice will have the reward of it and the reward of all who act upon it until the Day of Resurrection.

The Noble Quran presented this issue to us when Allah *the Almighty* said: ‘You who believe, do not cancel out your charitable deeds with reminders and hurtful words, like someone who spends his wealth only to be seen by people, not believing in God and the Last Day...’ (*al-Baqara*: 264). Then He *the Almighty* clarifies it by an example: ‘...Such a person is like a rock with earth on it: heavy rain falls and leaves it completely bare. Such people get no rewards for their works: God does not guide the disbelievers’ (*al-Baqara*: 264).

So the likeness of the ostentatious person is as the smooth and bare stone covered with a thick layer of soil: when rain falls on it, it washes off this soil and it is left bare and smooth and retains nothing and nothing can grow from it.

This parable embodies for us the loss of the ostentatious person's efforts. It shows that he is wilfully ignorant: he worked hard and people benefitted from his work and he passed his goodness on to others; but he ended up completely devoid of goodness and reward.

Allah *the Almighty* then gives the opposite image: 'And the parable of those who spend their possessions out of a longing to please Allah and out of their own inner certainty, is that of a garden on high, fertile ground: a rainstorm smites it and thereupon it brings forth its fruit twofold; and if no rainstorm smites it, soft rain [falls upon it]. And Allah sees all that you do' (*al-Baqara*: 265).

So giving charity whilst seeking Allah's countenance is like fertile land when rain falls upon it, so it brings forth its crops twofold and blessed. If heavy rain does not fall upon it, soft rain is enough for it to bring forth its fruits. Had He merely said 'that of a garden', it would have been enough; but He said '...a garden on high, fertile ground...' (*al-Baqara*: 265), that is, on high-lying ground which indicates its fertility; for the more a land is raised, the more fertile it is and it is free of the ground water which affects crops. This garden is irrigated by rain which comes to it from above, washing the leaves and stems, thereby increasing their lushness and quality and leaves are the lungs of plants.

Allah *the Almighty* causes the effect you have on others to remind and admonish you: one might do good for someone else in order to buy him with it, or to make him subservient by this favour. The natural result of this is that the person is ungrateful for this favour and even hates him and resents him and this is the appropriate reward for someone who does a deed without seeking Allah's countenance.

This is the meaning of the Arabic proverb: 'Fear the evil of the one for whom you do a kindness' But, why? Because when he sees you and mentions how he is beholden to you and the favour you did him, he will feel ashamed and humiliated because your presence hurts his pride. For this reason, he will hate your presence and hate to see you.

Allah *the Almighty* therefore highlights that, we should beware of annulling good deeds by ostentation, or by base intentions because the good you do will

be denied and the good you offer will come back to you as evil. So you must dedicate your good deeds to Allah's countenance, not to anyone else. If your favour is met with ingratitude your reward is preserved with Allah. It is as though your Lord is jealously protective of you and wants to preserve your good action and keep it safe with Him. A poet⁽¹⁾ expressed this concept by saying:

I say to generous people words
Which will give them peace if they do good for others:
The needy ones become subjected to you,
And if they discover this, they will leave you and flee.
So do not claim your goodness, however much it is repeated,
For the reward of Allah is greater and more bounteous.

I mentioned before the story of the man we met on the road in Algeria, who indicated that he needed a ride, so the driver stopped and opened the door for him, but before he got in he said, 'How much?', that is the price of taking him. The driver said, 'For Allah's sake,' the man replied, 'Too expensive, sir!'

For this reason, one of the wise ones said that those who seek Allah's countenance when they act thereby make their actions dear; that is, they raise their value and multiply their reward.

Allah's saying, 'Hence, give his due to the near of kin, as well as to the needy and the wayfarer...' (*ar-Rum*: 38) after having said, '...or gives it in scant measure...' (*ar-Rum*: 37) seemingly indicates that He takes from you even if you do not have much; and this falls within the confines of Allah's words: '...(they) give them preference over themselves, even though poverty be their own lot...' (*al-Hashr*: 9).

We said before that the Lawgiver *the Almighty* is Wise, so if He obliges you and takes from you, He does this in order to give to you if you become needy. It is as though He is saying to you, 'Rest assured that I have secured your life for you; if poverty afflicts you, or one day you are needy or a wayfarer, just as you did shall be done unto you.'

(1) It was Sheikh Ash-Sh'arawi himself *Allah rest his soul*.

This matter is clear in the case of guardianship of orphans. If a faithful society replaces his father for him in accordance with the words of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'I and the guardian of the orphan shall be as close as these two (fingers) in paradise',⁽¹⁾ every father would feel secure about his children if he ever were to die and leave them because they would be in a society which would replace their father for them with many fathers.

If a person is secure and blessed, the only thing that spoils this blessing is the knowledge that it might pass away; so Allah wants to assure for His servant a noble life for those who succeed him when he dies. This is the true insurance, which Allah sent as a matter of insurance in existence; it is not to be found with the insurance companies, but rather, it is to be found in Allah's hand, when He says: 'And let them stand in awe [of Allah] , those [legal heirs]– who, if they [themselves] had to leave behind weak offspring, would feel fear on their account – and let them remain conscious of Allah and let them speak [to the poor] in a just manner' (*an-Nisa'*: 9). If they are conscious of Allah and speak in a just manner, their orphaned children will find people to look after them and be concerned for them and handle their affairs.

When we, previously, studied the chapter of *al-Kahf* (the Cave), we looked at the story of the wall which Al-Khidr *Allah be pleased with him* volunteered to build even though it was in a village whose inhabitants were ignoble people who refused even to feed them. We said that asking for food is the most truthful of requests and no one should ever refuse the one who asks for it. Yet despite this, Al-Khidr *Allah be pleased with him* built the wall and then later explained this by saying: 'And as for that wall, it belonged to two orphan boys [living] in the town and beneath it was [buried], a treasure belonging to them [by right]. Now their father had been a righteous man...' (*al-Kahf*: 82).

(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his *Sahih* (6005) on the authority of Sahl ibn Sa'd and by Muslim in his *Sahih* (2983) on the authority of Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* and the rest of the Hadith is: 'And he gestured with his index and middle fingers.' The index finger is called *sababa* in Arabic because at the time it was used to curse (*sabb*) Satan (*Iblis*); it is also called the *sabbaha* because it is used to indicate praise *tasbih* in the prayer and to accompany the Testimony of Faith. (Ibn Hajar 'Al-Asqalani, *Fath Al-Bari*, x. 426)

So the righteousness of the parents benefitted the boys and Allah brought them someone to build the wall and protect their treasure for them until they grew up and were able to protect it from those ignoble people who, had they known of it, would have seized it from these two boys.

Allah *the Almighty* then tells us the difference between a gift and an act of charity, saying:

وَمَا آتَيْتُم مِّن رَّبٍّ لَّيِّبُوا فِي أَمْوَالِ النَّاسِ فَلَا يَرِيوُا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَمَا
 آتَيْتُم مِّن زَكَاةٍ تُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَ اللَّهِ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُضْعِفُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

**Whatever you lend out in usury to gain value through
 other people's wealth will not increase in God's eyes,
 but whatever you give in charity, in your desire for
 God's approval, will earn multiple rewards [39]
 (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 39)**

Allah *the Almighty* knows that His worshippers do good deeds and that they seek reward for this. This request, however, might come to nothing if they are ostentatious in their actions and the reward might be commensurate with the action if it is free of ostentation. Allah wants to raise the act of charity or the obligatory alms to a high level so that the reward from the Hand of Allah for the one who does it is multiplied and the desire for increase is part of the intention.

For example, the believer knows that if he is greeted with a phrase of greeting, he should answer it with a better greeting. A poor person might come and offer to a wealthy person whatever gift he is able to afford, with the hope that the wealthy person will return the gift with something which reflects his wealthy status. So when he gives, he is hoping to get more back, although this is not actually stipulated; it is possible that the wealthy person will return the gift with something better, or that he might not even return it at all.

Allah's words 'Whatever you lend out in usury...' (*ar-Rum*: 39) here refer to any kind of increase of what you give, an increase which is not stipulated in the contract; the increase might be money, or anything else

which brings benefit because they define usury by saying that any loan which brings benefit is usurious.⁽¹⁾

Abu Hanifa⁽²⁾, the pioneer scholar, used to sit in the shadow of his neighbour's wall. When his neighbour asked him to loan him some money and he gave it to him, the neighbour noticed that he would no longer sit in the shade of the wall as he had used to do. He asked him about this and he replied: 'I used to sit in the shade of your wall and I knew that it was a favour from you; but now I fear to sit there, so you do not think that this sitting is for the money which you took from me.'

So the meaning is: The usury you give out hoping that it might bring you increases, whether in the form of benefit or money, or something else and whether it is stipulated or not. They say: so what is the ruling in the case of a gift for which something better is given in return? What is my sin if I am the one who is given this? They say that there is nothing wrong with this, as long as your intention is not to get more and that your gift is unconditional; it is an act of love and kindness between people and you do not get any reward for it from Allah.

Allah *the Almighty* says: '...to gain value through other people's wealth...' (*ar-Rum*: 39); the word 'through' implies encapsulation since wealth is a receptacle and what you put into it decreases it and increases what you have; '...will not increase in Allah's eyes...' (*ar-Rum*: 39), it will increase what you have by the extra which you take from the one you greeted, but it will not increase in the sight of Allah.

(1) *Ash-Shawkani said in Nayl Al-awtar: A proof of the unlawfulness of any loan which brings benefit to the creditor is what Al-Bayhaqi narrated in Al-Ma'rifa on the authority of Fudala ibn 'Ubayd, who said in his own words: 'Every loan which brings benefit is a kind of usury.' It was also narrated in As-Sunan Al-kubra on the authority of Ibn Mas'ud, Ubayy ibn Ka'b, 'Abdullah ibn Salam and Ibn 'Abbas, in their own words. Al-Harith ibn Abu Usama also narrated it from 'Ali with the wording: 'The Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him forbade loans which bring benefit.' Another narration has it, 'Every loan which brings benefit is usury'; the chain of transmission includes Sawar ibn Mus'ab, who is considered to be rejected; 'Umar ibn Zayd said, in Al-Mughni, 'There has not been anything rigorously authenticated narrated about this matter.'*

(2) *The story of Abu Hanifa Allah be pleased with him and the shade of the wall*

This is what Ibn ‘Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* said,⁽¹⁾ although some of the scholars say that it refers to usury itself and this was a matter which needed to be legislated on; but Ibn ‘Abbas believed that the verse of usury was already known, whilst this verse referred to increases in the matter of greetings and favours between people.

Then Allah says: ‘...but whatever you give in charity, in your desire for Allah’s approval, will earn multiple rewards’ (*ar-Rum*: 39). That is, those who give the obligatory alms intending Allah’s countenance, ‘...will earn multiple rewards’ (*ar-Rum*: 39). This word does not come from the verb *id‘af* ‘to weaken’, but rather from the noun *ad‘af* ‘multiples’ since the obligatory alms is rewarded *ad‘af* ‘manifold’, as is clear from His words: ‘Who is it that will offer up unto Allah a goodly loan, which He will amply repay?...’ (*al-Hadid*: 11) As for usury, it is *id‘af*, ‘weakening.’

Some of the orientalisists, who used to criticise Allah’s word, have objected to this, saying: ‘There are verses in the Quran which contradict Prophetic hadiths. The Quran says: ‘Who is it that will offer up unto Allah a goodly loan, which He will amply repay?...’ (*al-Hadid*: 11).

So the reward of a goodly loan is doubled by Allah and you say that a good deed is rewarded tenfold. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘It is written upon the door to Paradise: “Charity is rewarded tenfold and loans are rewarded eighteen-fold”.’⁽²⁾ If a goodly loan doubles a good deed which is rewarded tenfold, this makes eighteen, not twenty.

We said to him: ‘If you give a dollar, for example, in charity, you have performed one good deed which will be multiplied for you tenfold; but will

(1) *Ibn ‘Abbas, Ibn Jubayr, Tawis and Mujahid Allah be pleased with them said that this verse was revealed in connection with gifts given in search of reward; Ibn ‘Utayya said: ‘As for everything else which a person does in order to be rewarded, such as giving a greeting and so on – although there is no sin in it, there is also no increase with Allah.’ Al-Qurtubi, At-Tafsir, v. 5293*

(2) *Narrated by Ibn Majah in his Musnad on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him, who said that the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: ‘The night I was taken up, I saw written on the door to Paradise: “Charity is rewarded tenfold and loans are rewarded eighteen-fold”.’ So I said, ‘O Gabriel, why are loans better than charity?’ He said, ‘Because the beggar may ask while he possesses something, whilst the one who asks for a loan is certainly in need.’*

the dollar which you gave be returned to you? No, so the reality of the matter is that you have taken nine, which is then doubled to make eighteen.'

They ask why the reward for a loan is more. My reply is: It is because when someone gives charity, his hope for what he has given ends immediately; but the one who gives a loan continues to think about the loan and wait for its return and the more he is patient he is rewarded for this. Moreover, the one who asks for a loan only does so because he has a real need of it, whilst someone might accept charity, whilst he has no need of it and he might be one of those people who hoard money.

So Allah *the Almighty* wants to promote lending; why? They say it is because Allah wants the motions of life to proceed and to be self-completing; you hold your wealth dear and fear for it and want it to increase and you will ensure all of this by lending; so give loans, for this is the way Allah has given you to attain increase and reward.

In addition to this, Allah *the Almighty* respects your ownership of your wealth and He is concerned with protecting it for you, saying: 'O you who have attained to faith! Whenever you give or take credit for a stated term, set it down in writing...' (*al-Baqara*: 282).

Allah preserves your wealth for you in order that your mind be at peace concerning this. Despite this He leaves room for the peace of mind and dignity of the one to whom it is given: '...but if you trust one another, then let him who is trusted fulfil his trust and let him be conscious of Allah, his lord...' (*al-Baqara*: 283).

By this faithful philosophy, wealth is circulated and the motions of life proceed by means of it, in a way that secures the wealth of he who owns it because he loves it and is concerned for it and also secures for the one who has no wealth a chance to work by the wealth of another. If there is a trust to be fulfilled, everyone who owes a trust must give it to the one to whom it rightfully belongs.

If these balances are disturbed and the poor person is lax in repaying the wealthy person and does not give back to him what is rightfully his, society will be corrupted and these values will disintegrate in it. When this happens, we cannot blame the one who is able to give for refusing to give his wealth to

those who need loans and why not? People are usurping the rights of others and this will cause the motions of life to stop and society will be held back from the course of progress.

If the usury is not stipulated, meaning the gains which people get in the exchange of giving gifts, favours and greetings which Allah has made as ways of expressing affection and dignity amongst people, Allah *the Almighty* neither rewards this nor punishes it and He says that it ‘...will not increase in Allah’s eyes (*ar-Rum*: 39).

As for that usury which is stipulated, Allah declared a complete prohibition of it and ordained punishment for it, making this punishment akin to the opposite of what is intended by the one who takes usury: you take usury in order to increase your wealth, so Allah *the Almighty* replies to this by decreasing from you: ‘Allah deprives usurious gains of all blessing...’ (*al-Baqara*: 276). Why is this? Scholars explain this as follows: the one who gives is wealthy and well-off and has an excess of wealth from which he can give, as for the needy one who takes the loan, how can we ask a needy person to increase the wealth of the one who is rich and free of need? What will the needy person think of you when he knows that you have more wealth than you need yet you refuse to give him a goodly loan but rather stipulate that he must pay you back even more, taking more from him when he is needy?

Then suppose that I take this loan to invest and seek to make it grow, but this fails. Is it not enough that I fail in my own work and that my effort is wasted? Is it justice that I fail in my own work and then am forced to pay back even more? This is not justice because the condition of a contract is that it protects the welfare of both sides, whilst the contract of usury only protects the welfare of the creditor.

We see that even in man-made legal systems of economics, when a bank gives money to someone for a project, for example and then he fails and they want to settle his affair, the first thing they do is to forgo the interest. This accords with what Allah legislates when He says: ‘...But if you repent, then you shall be entitled to (the return of) your principal: you will do no wrong and neither will you be wronged’ (*al-Baqara*: 279). ‘You will do no wrong’ means that we will return your principal to you; and ‘neither will you be

wronged' means we will not wrong you in any other way, so we say to you: If you want to repent, then, return the usury you have taken in a retroactive manner because what you have taken has been spent and it is difficult to return it. In this way, we look after the welfare of the creditor by returning to him his principal and we look after the welfare of the debtor by not forcing him to return more than he is able.

Let us reflect on the following matter: are nations stronger, or individuals? Nations are stronger. Have you ever seen a nation take a loan from another nation and then be able to repay even the interest on this loan, never mind the principal? Likewise, there are powerful people who take loans and then do not pay back even the interest and are unable to repay it or to settle their affair and thereby fall into disputes and problems.

Another thing: suppose that a man has one thousand pounds and another man has nothing: the one who has a thousand is able to circulate it and to live on it, whilst the one who has nothing must take loans to live like his friend. If you tell him that in order to borrow one thousand, he must pay back an additional hundred; wherefrom will he get this hundred?

If he takes it from the revenue the money brings him, he will lose out. If he takes it from the products he sells by decreasing their quality, or reducing the active ingredients of the product or its packaging, the product will be below standard and will not sell well. So the consumer will bear the brunt of this and this will harm him even though he has nothing to do with the contract; and the contract is therefore unsound.

When we say that Islam is right for every time and place, we must understand this issue properly. Beware of saying that Islam is not right for such a time, or such a place.

Now we hear some people straying from the teachings of Islam and saying to you, 'Allah does not burden any human being with more than he is well able to bear...' (*al-Baqara*: 286). That is, he is not well able to bear the implementation of Allah's Law in this time. But we say to him: Who is it that defines what you are well able to bear? Do you define it, or does the Lawgiver?

As long as Allah has held you responsible for something, know that this responsibility is within the limit of what you can well bear. Define what you can

well bear according to that for which Allah holds you responsible; do not define what you can well bear whilst forgetting that for which Allah holds you responsible. This is why you see that when your ability is diminished, Allah lightens the burden for you without your even asking Him to do so, such as is the case with prayer and fasting for the one who is ill or on a journey and so on and as is the case with the *tayammum* ‘dry ablution’ for the one who is unable to use water.

So it is meaningless for us to say that the teachings of the religion do not suit the current times: in that case, make the current time into the lawgiver and set aside the Law of Heaven for that which the current time allows.

This is why we said that when Allah *the Almighty* issues responsibilities, He says: ‘Say: ‘Come...’ (*al-An‘am*: 151). The meaning of ‘come’ here is: rise above the level of human caprices and ascend to the responsibilities given by Allah. If you bring down these responsibilities to your own level, saying that the circumstances of the age prevent you from doing such-and-such, you have thereby subjected the decree of Heaven to the decree of the earth. The decree of Heaven only came to raise you up.

If we look at the positions of the scholars regarding usury, there are those who deem it lawful and those who deem it unlawful – and they are the majority. Even if we imagined that those who deemed it unlawful were equal in number to those who deemed it lawful: what is Allah’s judgement concerning cases where juristic opinion is evenly split?

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* clarified this matter saying, ‘The lawful is clear and the unlawful is clear; and between them are doubtful matters, unknown to many people. And so those who stay clear of doubtful matters thereby free themselves of suspicion regarding their religion and their dignity; and those who fall into doubtful matters fall into the unlawful, just like a shepherd who tends his flock near the reserved pasture and is on the brink of entering it. Every king had his reserved land and the reserved land of Allah is all He has prohibited.’⁽¹⁾

(1) *This Hadith is agreed upon by Al-Bukhari and Muslim: Al-Bukhari narrated it in his Sahih (2051) and Muslim narrated it in his Sahih (1599), on the authority of Nu‘man ibn Bashir Allah be pleased with him.*

Did the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* say: 'So those who engage in doubtful matters...' or 'so those who leave aside doubtful matters...'? So those who fall into doubtful matters do not free themselves of suspicion, regarding neither their religion nor their reputation; would anyone like to be described in this way? It is strange that we hear people say, 'What does dignity have to do with this issue?' We say: By Allah, even those who do not believe in any religion do not like to be called 'usurers'; their dignity does not accept this, never mind their religion.

This is why those schemers who wish to exploit this and to live on the blood of others do not realise that benefit is the law with which Allah rules His creatures, giving them ten rewards for every good deed; this is why the Jews say, 'How can you forbid usury when Allah deals with you with it?' Yes, Allah *the Almighty* does indeed deal with us with usury and He gives us an increase because this increase does not take anything away from what Allah has, whilst the increase that people take from the needy overburdens them and makes them even poorer and needier.

Furthermore, reflect on the surroundings in which you live: in every land there are people who love usury and deal in it, yet have you ever seen a usurer die a good death? Did a usurer ever die with his fortune in one piece? No, because Allah *the Almighty* would not say 'Allah deprives usurious gains of all blessing...' (*al-Baqara*: 267) and then leave a usurer to see his money grow and be secure for him until he died. Even if he is rich for a while, his wealth is nothing but a trap for him and a way of harming him even more, as the saying goes: 'If Allah is angry with someone, He sends them unlawfully-gained provision. If His anger with them becomes even more severe, He gives it to them abundantly.'

Read Allah's words: 'Then, when they had forgotten all that they had been told to take to heart, We threw open to them the gates of all [good] things, until – even as they were rejoicing in what they had been granted – We suddenly took them to task: and lo! they were broken in spirit' (*al-An'am*: 44). This is why we hear people say, 'So-and-so is a brilliant businessman', or 'Everything so-and-so touches turns into gold' and so on.

We clarified before the difference between 'We threw open for them' and 'We threw open to them': 'for them' means for their own good, whilst 'to them'

means as a trap for them and a challenge and a means of ruin. Allah gives to the disbeliever and showers him with the fortune of this world so that whatever he takes is a cause of pain for him, as we said: If you want to trap your enemy, do not trap him from a low place, but rather from a high place so that his fall will be all the more painful.

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘...until – even as they were rejoicing in what they had been granted...’ (*al-An‘am*: 44). Rejoicing in a blessing is not forbidden; but there is a kind of rejoicing which is praiseworthy and another which is blameworthy since Allah ascribes rejoicing to the believers in the chapter of *ar-Rum* when He says: ‘...And on that day will the believers [too, have cause to] rejoice [4] in Allah’s succour... [5]’ (*ar-Rum*: 4-5). He says: ‘exulting in that [martyrdom] which Allah has bestowed upon them...’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 170) and He says: ‘in this, then, let them rejoice...’ (*Yunus*: 58). So He affirmed for them the acceptable kind of rejoicing, which is the kind which follows our word, ‘Such is Allah’s will! There is no power save by Allah’ and then you give thanks to Allah, Who gave you this blessing. As for the blameworthy kind of rejoicing, it is to rejoice in that which causes you to be proud, boastful, and arrogant.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ ثُمَّ رَزَقَكُمْ ثُمَّ يُمِيتُكُمْ ثُمَّ يُحْيِيكُمْ هَلْ مِنْ شُرَكَائِكُمْ مَنْ يَفْعَلُ مِنْ ذَلِكَكُمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ سُبْحَنَهُ وَتَعَالَى عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾

It is God who created you and provided for you, who will cause you to die and then give you life again. Which of your ‘partners’ can do any one of these things? Glory be to God, and exalted be He above the partners they attribute to Him [40] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 40)

We said before that the matter of creation is a postulate. It is something which no one has ever claimed for himself despite the profusion of those who flaunt their disbelief and atheism. This is why when Nimrod, who argued with Abraham (Ibrahim) *peace be upon him* about his Lord, claimed this by saying, ‘I grant life and deal death’, Abraham (Ibrahim) *peace be upon him* saw that he

only wanted to be obstinate and employ useless sophistry; if not, how could killing one person be described as 'dealing death' and leaving another person alone and pardoning him as 'granting life'?

Then what about those who were created before you and born before you were born? So you have not created or given life to anyone. I explained before the difference between killing and death, although they are alike in that they both mean the end of life and the setting loose of the spirit; but death means that the spirit is released first after which the material shell is broken and the body is destroyed. As for killing, this means to break the body first in a way which necessitates the exit of the spirit, since the spirit can only live in a sound body. We illustrated this with the example of a light bulb which burns out so that its light goes out: does this mean that the power has been cut off from it? No, it is still present, but it needs a sound form to work, which is proved by the fact that if we change the bulb it will light up again.

Allah *the Almighty* explains to us this difference when He says: 'And Muhammad is only a messenger; all the [other] messengers have passed away before him: if, then, he dies or is slain, will you turn about on your heels?' (*Al-Imran*: 144) So Nimrod did not grant life, but rather, he left life as it was. He did not deal death, but rather killed and released the spirit forcibly.

It was within the ability of Abraham (Ibrahim) *peace be upon him* to rebut this argument of his and show its fallacy, but he wanted to move him to another area in which he could not concoct or contrive any false argument, so he said to him: "Verily, Allah causes the sun to rise in the east; cause it, then, to rise in the west!" Thereupon he who was bent on denying the truth remained dumbfounded... (*al-Baqara*: 258). The same is true in the case of provision; it is acknowledged to be Allah's work, which no one else has claimed for himself: 'It is Allah who created you and provided for you' (*ar-Rum*: 40).

This is borne out by the fact that Allah has made some places barren so that both the able-bodied and the incapable go hungry and the wealthy and the poor go hungry; if there were any provider other than Allah, he would bring life to these barren places.

Allah *the Almighty* then says '...who will cause you to die and then give you life again...' (*ar-Rum*: 40) – He did not say 'then He will kill you' – '...can

do any one of these things?’ (*ar-Rum*: 40) That is, ask them this question and leave them to answer it for themselves: can the idols which you associate with Allah do any of the acts of creation, provision, granting life, or dealing death?

Is any of this within their power, when you are the ones who make them and carve their stones with your own hands and shape them as you like and if a storm comes and blows one of them over and breaks its arm, you set it aright and repair it? Where, then, are your intellects? What is the matter with you? This is why He says about them: ‘Now those beings that some people invoke beside Allah cannot create anything, since they themselves are but created: ’ (*an-Nahl*: 20).

And He says: ‘...Behold, those beings whom you invoke instead of Allah cannot create [as much as] a fly, even were they to join all their forces to that end!...’ (*al-Hajj*: 73) And more than this, ‘...And if a fly robs them of anything, they cannot [even] rescue it from him! Weak indeed is the seeker and [weak] the sought!’ (*al-Hajj*: 73) By Allah *the Almighty* can anyone get back that which a fly takes from him?

We notice here that Arabic particle *min* (any of) which indicates partition has been repeated in the original Arabic verse (*ar-Rum*: 40). ‘...can do any one of these things? Glory be to Allah, and exalted be He above the partners they attribute to Him’ (*ar-Rum*: 40). This means: none of those to whom you ascribe a share of divinity can undertake any kind of creation, provision, granting life, or dealing death of even the smallest thing. This is why you must comment on these matters which Allah *the Almighty* conveys to you with a single expression: ‘...Glory be to Allah, and exalted be He above the partners they attribute to Him’ (*ar-Rum*: 40).

There is nothing further to add. This is why when our master Abraham (Ibrahim) *peace be upon him* spoke about idols, he said: ‘...verily, these [false deities] are my enemies...’ (*ash-Shu'ara*: 77). That is, you and all that you worship instead of Allah because they associated their gods with Allah, so Allah *the Almighty* was included in this association which is why he then excepted his Lord from this: ‘...save the Lord of all the worlds, [77] who has created me and is the One Who guides me [78]’ (*ash-Shu'ara*: 77-78).

We notice here that when he said 'who has created me...' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 78), he did not emphasise it in any way, such as by saying 'who is the One Who has created me', because as we said the matter of creation has not been claimed by anyone. When he, however, spoke of guidance, which is something for which claims have been made, he said: '...and is the One Who guides me' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 78). This is an indication that the law which governs my life and the way of teachings which guide me, is the law of my Lord and I take it from no one else besides Him. There are many people we see who claim to have guidance, saying, 'I have created a law which will make people's lives happy and do such-and-such'; we have heard this claim once from the capitalists and once again from the socialists and the communists and so on.

So this is an area in which many claims have been made, so Abraham (*Ibrahim*) *peace be upon him* specified it and limited it to Allah since there is no way except Allah's way and no law governs us except the law of our Lord, as we say in our dialect: 'There is nothing but Him.'

Likewise, in the matter of providing food, he said: 'and is the One Who gives me to eat...' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 79). He used the words 'is the One' before the pronoun 'who' in order to emphasise that the One Who gave him food was Allah Alone, since a person might imagine that his father is the one who feeds him, or that his mother is the one who feeds him because she prepares food for him; they are the outward causes of this, which means that further emphasis is needed.

Then he *peace be upon him* says: 'and who will cause me to die and then will bring me back to life?' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 81) without any emphasis because life and death are two things which are acknowledged to be Allah's work and that is that. Likewise, he says: 'and who, I hope, will forgive me my faults on Judgment Day!' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 82) This is also something which can only apply to Allah.

So for those things in which other than Allah might appear to play some part, he emphasises them and ascribes them to Allah Alone. As for those things which no one other than Allah plays any part in, he mentions them in a general way without any special ascription.

The only way to comment on this wondrous thing is to say ‘Glory be to Allah, and exalted be He above the partners they attribute to Him’ (*ar-Rum*: 40). That is, He is exalted above any association. If the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has told us that Allah says, ‘There is no deity but Me’ and no one made a counter-claim in this regard and no one claimed it for himself, this means that it is an accepted fact. Otherwise, if there is another deity, then where is he? Why does he not defend his right to divinity? If he does not know, then he is ignorant. If he knows and does not object then he is a coward; either way, he is not fit to be a God.

This is why our Lord passed judgment over this matter with a single word, saying: ‘Say: "If there were – as some people assert – [other] deities side by side with Him, surely [even] they would have to strive to find a way unto Him who is enthroned on His almightiness"' (*al-Isra*’: 42).

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ
لِيُذِيقَهُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي عَمِلُوا لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

Corruption has flourished on land and sea as a result of people’s actions and He will make them taste the consequences of some of their own actions so that they may turn back [41] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 41)

‘Has flourished’ means: has become clear and plain; to appear means that something already existed, but we do not see it. As long as Allah *the Almighty* said ‘Corruption has flourished...’ (*ar-Rum*: 41), the corruption must already have existed, but the harbingers of corruption concealed it and obscured it until it crept in and took root in society.

Corruption itself does not appear, but rather, its effects appear. Do you remember the earthquake which struck and revealed the corruption, cheating and fraud of the building contractor and the architect: the buildings were standing and the corruption was concealed, either because of our unawareness of it, or our complicity in it, or our lack of concern for things – until things came to a head and Allah opened the ground with an earthquake to reveal to us the corruption which existed in our midst.

If cheating increases and negligence becomes widespread, it is inevitable that Allah will reveal it to the people. There is no one left who can oppose corruption or prevent it, so Allah *the Almighty* intervenes and exposes the harbingers of corruption and makes them experience the effects of what they have done.

The Arabic word *zhahara* here means 'flourished', it can also mean 'to prevail', as when Allah *the Almighty* says: '...But [now] We have given strength against their foes unto those who have [truly] attained to faith: and they have become the ones that shall prevail' (*as-Saff*: 14), where the word *zhahirin* is used for 'the ones that shall prevail.' And in the chapter of *at-Tahrim*, He says: '...And if you uphold each other *tazhahara* against him...' (*at-Tahrim*: 4). It can also mean 'to go up' or 'to scale', as in: 'and thus [the rampart was built and] their enemies were unable to scale it and neither were they able to pierce it' (*al-Kahf*: 97).

So the meaning of 'corruption has flourished' is that it has prevailed against soundness and gained ascendancy over it. Allah created the universe in a state of soundness and prepared it wonderfully to receive mankind. In order to confirm the truth of this, look at the universe and the genera, celestial bodies and environments which it contains and you will see no corruption except in those things in which man has had a hand.

As for those things which have been left untouched by man, you see no imbalance in them because Allah *the Almighty* created them to be harmonious in their genera and their form: '[and] neither may the sun overtake the moon, nor can the night usurp the time of day, since all of them float through space [in accordance with Our laws]' (*Ya Sin*: 40).

So did Allah *the Almighty* create us and create our free will so that we could spread corruption in the universe? No, it is only the trial of free will when He sends His way down to you and makes it a law which governs your motions based on 'do' and 'do not': 'In those things in which I did not say "do" or "do not" you are free since to do it or not do it will not cause any harm to the universe; as for Me, I have said "do" with respect to those things where harm will arise if they are not done and I have said "do not" with respect to those things where harm will arise if they are done.'

Corruption occurs when you interfere in something whilst violating Allah's law of 'do' and 'do not do'; as for soundness, it exists and contains within it a defence mechanism to combat corruption; and if corruption gains the upper hand and prevails against soundness, it becomes plain for the people to see.

At this point, Allah *the Almighty* alerts us to what is happening to us and says: 'Look at what has happened to the one who violated Allah's way.' This is why, when the ends of events become clear, our love for Allah and our eagerness to obey Him increase and you see people 'treading on eggshells' in their caution; but they quickly return to their previous state of negligence and heedlessness, as the poet said:

Funerals scare us as we walk to them
Yet we walk away from them heedless,
Like sheep are stricken by the howl of a wolf,
And go back to grazing once it falls silent.

Allah *the Almighty* says 'corruption has flourished...' (*ar-Rum*: 41), that is, it has prevailed over the law of soundness upon which Allah based the order of this universe which is corrupted if the hand of man touches it, as He says: 'But if the truth were in accord with their own likes and dislikes, the heavens and the earth would surely have fallen into ruin...' (*al-Mu'minun*: 71).

The phenomena of the universe exist for everyone and it is wisdom that man's hand should not touch them, because Allah wants the universe to continue to exist and the time has not yet come for it to end. This is why Allah *the Almighty* placed within us a defence mechanism which makes us accept corruption up to a certain point and when this point is reached everything explodes.

Allah's words 'corruption has flourished on land...' (*ar-Rum*: 41) refer to the answer to a supplication made by the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because the word 'has flourished' indicates that something occurred. It is as though He is saying to us: 'If you keep repeating this corruption and heedlessness, the appearance of corruption will keep being repeated.' He is thereby giving us a summary of what actually happened as a result of the enmity they showed the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and their embargo against him and their ostracising of him, and the way they

encouraged the simpletons amongst them to abuse him, and then the enmity they showed his Companions and how they forced them to emigrate to Abyssinia because it was impossible for them to stay peacefully in Mecca.

For this reason, the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* supplicated against them, saying: 'O Allah, bring down Your grievous wrath upon Mudarr and send upon them years like the years Yusuf (Joseph) endured!'⁽¹⁾ And they were afflicted by drought and famine, to the point that it is related that they would go to the sea to fish and the fish would avoid them and refuse to be caught by them, so that they went home empty-handed.

This is the meaning of: 'corruption has flourished on land and in the sea...' (*ar-Rum*: 41). Allah *the Almighty* then gives the reason for this corruption: '...as a result of people's actions...' (*ar-Rum*: 41).

One can observe here that when Allah *the Almighty* mentions mercy, He does not give a cause for it, but He does mention the cause for corruption. This is because mercy is, from beginning to end, pure grace from Allah *the Almighty*, whilst chastisement and torment are based on His justice, which is why He explains to you that you have done such-and-such so you deserve such-and-such; the cause is plain.

There is something else which I would like to clarify for you, which is that Allah *the Almighty* treats His creatures in a certain way when it comes to reward. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'whoever comes [before Allah] with a good deed will gain ten times the like thereof...' (*al-An'am*: 160).

So a single good deed effaces ten bad deeds. This is also the case with the human body, as some of the scientists of biology and anatomy say that the kidney contains a million cells of which one tenth works at a time, taking it in turns; one group works while the others rest and so on. Look at how the cell rests until its turn comes to work.

(1) Narrated by Imam Ahmad in his *Musnad* (ii. 470, 502, 521) and by Al-Bukhari in his *Sahih* (1006), on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him who said that: when the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* raised his head from the final obeisance of the prayer, he said: 'O Allah, bring down Your grievous wrath upon Mudarr! O Allah, send upon them years like the years Joseph endured!'

It is as though our Lord *the Almighty* created it so that one tenth of the million does the work of all of it. This is why they say that if an office contains ten employees and one of them is a good worker, he will conceal the ineptitude of the others. We see this phenomenon very often in government offices: you find that most of the workers are distracted, one reading a newspaper, another drinking tea, another not even turning up at all.

And behind a stack of files you find a single emaciated member of staff drowning in work, everyone seeking him out and he makes up for the negligence of the others and does their work for them and things are held together by him. But if we lack his presence too, there will surely come the time of: ‘corruption has flourished...’ (*ar-Rum*: 41). So if you see corruption, know that it is the result of negligence and heedlessness which has gone beyond all limits.

As long as Allah *the Almighty* says ‘...as a result of people’s actions and He will make them taste the consequences of some of their own actions’ (*ar-Rum*: 41), it must be that this corruption has come from their doings. By Allah, have we ever complained about a critical shortage of air, for example? But we complain about the pollution of the air as an outcome of what men’s hands have wrought; yet when we go to the countryside where no human beings live, we find that the air there is clean just as Allah created it.

And Allah *the Almighty* undertook to provide us with nourishment, saying: ‘...and equitably apportioned its means of subsistence...’ (*Fussilat*: 10), yet we complain of food crises. Why? Because food requires work and we have been indolent and we have behaved badly in the universe, by indolence and laziness in extracting the good things of the earth and its nourishment, or else by selfishness when the one who has refused to give the one who has not.

For example, we read that America pours excess milk into the sea and destroys a great deal of produce, whilst there are people in the world starving to death. This is selfishness, then; as for indolence, we have been guilty of it in the past.

For example, look at our desert which was barren and empty and how it is now lush and has become a source of goodness once we took interest in it and made it easier for people to own. If the earth gave up nothing in one area, Allah gave us abundantly in another area; for the Creator did not make the

earth for one race or one nation, but rather, He made it for all of Allah's creatures alike.

Read His words: '...Was, then, Allah's earth not wide enough for you to forsake the domain of evil...' (*an-Nisa'*: 97). This is why I said to the United Nations: There is one verse in the Quran which, if the world applied it, would secure for it ease, stability and security, which is His word: 'And the earth has He spread out for all living beings' (*ar-Rahman*: 10).

The earth, all the earth, is for living beings, all living beings; but what is happening in reality goes against this, since they have made boundaries in the world and placed barriers and walls around them, so that if you want to go from one country to another you must undergo a great deal of hassle in the form of paperwork and visas and so on. The result of this is that there exists, in the world, men who are cramped together with no land, whilst in other parts of the world there are lands with no men; if there could be integration between the one and the other, things would be put right.

So the ones who made borders and barriers on Allah's earth took them for themselves, it did not remain the wide earth of Allah which could accept people from anywhere, but rather, they turned it into their own earth and subjugated it to their own laws. You can be amazed by studying national borders on a map and see how they intermesh with one another, so that part of one country seems to enter the space of another country in a triangular shape, for example, or the area of one country extends into another in the shape of a tongue, or a zigzag shape. As long as you have made borders between each other, why not make them straight?

The ones who made these borders wanted to make them a source of conflict between nations; and these divisions are never free of caprice and tribal, ethnic, national, and religious partisanship. Yet if we were to apply Allah's saying: 'He set down the earth for His creatures' (*ar-Rahman*: 10), we would not have to suffer all these difficulties.

Allah *the Almighty* says: '...have wrought...' (*ar-Rum*: 41). In Arabic, we have the verbs *kasaba* and *iktasaba*, and usually *kasaba* means to do a good deed, whilst *iktasaba* means to do an evil deed because good deeds come from the believer naturally without any affectation or artifice, so they can be

described using the simple root verb form *kasaba*. As for the evil deeds, they are unnatural. Therefore, they need affectation and artifice from you, so they can be described using the derived verb form which indicates artifice, namely; *iktasaba*.

Do you not see that when you are at home, you look at your wife and daughters as you wish, yet when you look at an unrelated woman you steal glances at her surreptitiously? All of your movements are artificial: why? This is because you are doing something unlawful and forbidden. As for good deeds, you do them automatically and naturally without any affectation.

Moreover, good deeds do not require any strenuous effort from you, whilst evil deeds require you to muster your strength for them, and to be cautious. Anyone who steals, for example, must use a lot of effort, and fight his limbs, since in reality they object to what he is doing.

Despite this, we see that Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Truly those who do (*kasaba*) evil and are surrounded by their sins will be the inhabitants of the Fire...’ (*al-Baqara*: 81). So here He describes evil deeds with the verb *kasaba*, not *iktasaba*. The scholars said this is because evil deeds for this person have become habitual and easy so that they have become something natural which he does without thinking about it, just as another person does good deeds. This kind of person – God forbid – has come to love and adore evil deeds so that he does them in the open and does not conceal them, to the extent that he exults in doing them. We call such a person ‘unscrupulous’ because evil and corruption have become a profession for him, and he is not affected by them, nor does he feel ashamed of them. This is like a person who accepts bribes and exults in them, and if you ask him about it, he says: ‘so what? I am not robbing people!’

Allah then says: ‘... He will make them taste the consequences of some of their own actions...’ (*ar-Rum*: 41). The tasting here is a punishment, but it is a punishment of correction, just like when you punish your son and cause him pain because of your concern for him. We said before that we must not separate an action from its doer. Another boy might attack your son and cut him, so you take him to the doctor, and he cuts him even worse: but one is the cut of the attacker, and the other is the cut of the healer. When Allah makes a

person taste the evil of some of his doings, He thereby wakes him up from his heedlessness and rouses in him the natural disposition of faith so that he becomes cautious and is neither negligent nor remiss; and this faithful awakening will stay with him according to the level of his faithful conscience: one person will remain alert for a month and then go back to how he was, whilst another will remain for a year, and a third will remain for the rest of his life without going back to his heedlessness. Allah *the Almighty* caused the people of Mecca to taste the result of their disbelief when they were hungry and found nothing to eat except a mixture of the blood and hair of camels, called '*ilhiz* in Arabic.

He *the Almighty* then says: '...so that they may turn back' (*ar-Rum*: 41) because this discourse refers to the life of this world which is not the world of requital; Allah *the Almighty* lets them taste the evil of some of their doings so that they take heed of Him, and repent and return to the confines of faith; for they are His servants, and He is more merciful to them than a mother is with her child.

When Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Corruption has flourished...' (*ar-Rum*: 41), this refers to the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in order to show us that the Messengers only came to save mankind from this corruption; but as long as the matter has a cause, this means it will continue to be linked to this cause with respect to when it is present and when it is absent. This means that whenever corruption appears, the punishment will be liable to occur, and you can take this as one of Allah's signs in the universe until the end of time.

Corruption appeared in the past; Allah says: '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; they wronged themselves' (*al-'Ankabut*: 40). But this taking to task occurred to the nations which came before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and it was a complete annihilation. This is because the previous Messengers were not commanded to wage war in order to spread their call; they only had to pass on the religion and give the Message whilst being aided by miracles; and if their people refused them, Allah *the Almighty* took care of their punishment. As for the *ummah* of Prophet

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Allah *the Almighty* was generous with them by not punishing them with the torment of annihilation; He *the Almighty* says: ‘But Allah would not send them punishment while you [Prophet] are in their midst, nor would He punish them if they sought forgiveness’ (*al-Anfal*: 33). Then the corruption would appear later, and the punishment for it would also appear; so the Islamic *ummah* did not do anything new in this matter. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قُلْ سِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَانظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ
الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلُ كَانَ أَكْثَرُهُمْ مُشْرِكِينَ ﴿٤٢﴾

**Say, ‘Travel through the land, and see how those
before you met their end – most of them were
idolaters’ [42] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 42)**

‘To travel’ means to move from one place to another; we said before that the superficial view of the matter says that we travel on the earth, not in it because we live on the earth, not in it. But Allah *the Almighty* makes us aware with His Words: ‘Say, “Travel through the land”...’ (*ar-Rum*: 42) that the earth does not only mean the dry land and water on the surface of the planet, but rather includes its atmosphere, which is why it revolves along with it since there could be no life in the earth without it.

So, the air of the earth is part of the earth, and is the most important constituent of life on it. When Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘...and equitably apportioned its means of subsistence...’ (*Fussilat*: 10), this includes air; and this is why He says: ‘Say, Travel through the land...’ (*ar-Rum*: 42). We said that if you consider all the genera of existence, you will find that you are the highest genus in existence, and all the genera below you serve you: you benefit from animals, plants, and minerals; and even the lowest genus in existence, the mineral, has a purpose to serve.

In addition, if you, O man, whom Allah honoured above all the other genera of existence, do not search for a role to play in life, and a purpose to serve, you are thereby lower in rank than the lowest of genera, the mineral. If you do not use your mind to search for something you are linked with and which suits your

mastery above all that is below you, you are more worthless than a stone; for the stone has a purpose which it serves, whilst you have no purpose.

But, if Allah *the Almighty* wills, He can give this lowest genus honour above the master it serves, namely, man: on the obligatory pilgrimage, it is part of the Prophetic tradition for you to kiss a stone, and try your level best to reach it and kiss it. Reflect on man – who is the master of this existence – as he tries to kiss a stone, and becomes angry if he is not able to do so. Reflect also upon the response which stones could give to those who worshipped them, as the poet⁽¹⁾ said:

They worshipped us, yet we worshipped Allah more
 Than those who pray in the watches of the night;
 They took our silence as a proof against us,
 So we became the fuel of the Fire for them;
 They blamed us ignorantly, just as they blamed
 The Son of Mary and the Apostles;
 The deluded will be requited; as for the object
 Of their delusion: the mercy of the All-Forgiving will save them.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘...and see how those before you met their end...’ (*ar-Rum*: 42). Travelling upon the earth is done either for the purpose of sightseeing and reflecting on Allah’s signs in His universe, which is why the Arabic particle *fa* implying causality, is used for: ‘...and see...’ (*ar-Rum*: 42), or else, it is done for the purpose of seeking provisions.

In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Say, “Travel throughout the earth and see”...’ (*al-An‘am*: 11). This means: ‘travel in the earth to invest, seek sustenance, and find needs; but do not neglect to look at and reflect on Allah’s Signs in His creations, in order to take admonition and guidance from them.’

The saying of Allah, ‘... how those before you met their end...’ (*ar-Rum*: 42) refers to those amongst whom corruption emerged so that Allah made them taste the pain of what their hands had wrought; for this is not for you alone,

(1) It was Sheikh Ash Sha’rawi himself.

but rather, it happened to the previous nations, as Allah *the Almighty* said: ‘You [people] pass by their ruins morning’ (*as-Saffat*: 137). There are the settlements of Saleh, and dwellings covered by the Ahqaf desert, and the dwellings of ‘Ad, Thamud and the Pharaohs, and so on. Look at what happened to them after the civilisation and advancement they had achieved, and after the advanced knowledge of mummification and stone-work which they attained, the secrets of which science has not yet discovered even now, and how they could place seeds of wheat or oats alongside dead bodies and they remained as they were so that if they were planted now after thousands of years, they would grow.

This is a highly advanced level of scientific prowess; yet this civilisation was unable to protect itself from decline. If the Quran says of the Pharaonic civilisation: ‘and the mighty and powerful Pharaoh?’ (*al-Fajr*: 10) and it says of *Iram*: ‘whose like has never been made in any land’ (*al-Fajr*: 8), what kind of civilisation must this have been? And where is it now? It is concealed beneath the sands of the Ahqaf desert,⁽¹⁾ which buried it beneath layers of earth. Do not be surprised by this, since in that region if a single sandstorm blows, it can cover a whole caravan, with its camels and men, beneath the earth; so what about the accumulation of many storms over the years? This is why we find that all archaeological investigations are done by digging. So, despite their greatness, these civilisations could not defend themselves from extinction which proves that there is a Power higher than them which eliminates them and causes them to come to an end. Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘... most of them were idolaters...’ (*ar-Rum*: 42). That is, a minority of them were not idolaters; scholars said that this minority were the children and the insane, and those who had no free will; and if this minority were taken along with the idolatrous majority, Allah only wanted the best for them because their destiny would be to enter paradise without any account. This is why when we spoke about Moses (Musa) and the righteous servant in the chapter of *al-Kahf*, we said that when Al-Khidr killed the young man, Moses (Musa) was astounded: the first time he holed a ship and violated property,

(1) Al-Azhari said: ‘The Ahqaf are sand-dunes in the land of Yemen where ‘Ad used to reside.’ Lisan Al-‘Arab, under the definition of the root h-q-f.

whilst the second time, he actually separated a spirit from its body. This is why after the first incident, Moses (Musa) said: '...What a strange thing to do!' (*al-Kahf*: 71) That is, a strange thing, whilst after the second incident, he said: '...What a terrible thing to do!' (*al-Kahf*: 74) Then Al-Khidr explained the wisdom behind killing the young man saying that his parents were righteous and Allah knew that he would corrupt their religion for them, since strife usually comes to a man either from his spouse or from his child, as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Believers, even among your spouses and your children you have some enemies – beware of them – ...' (*at-Taghabun*: 14). Why? Because they will try to make you do more than you are able to, and perhaps force you to steal or take bribes in order to get for them what they desire; and since corruption can come because of them, Allah *the Almighty* says: '...He has neither spouse nor child' (*al-Jinn*: 3) which means: 'Rest assured, my servants, that no one can influence My Will.'

So, Al-Khidr did the parents a favour when he saved them from this son, and he also did a favour to the boy by killing him before he reached the age of responsibility and thereby making paradise his final end; had he left him alone, he may have become a disbeliever in Allah and a source of hardship for his parents. All of this was only done according to Allah's Commandment and His Wisdom: '... I did not do [these things] of my own accord...' (*al-Kahf*: 82). It is as though He *the Almighty* conveyed this matter to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* beginning with: 'Corruption has flourished on land and sea as a result of people's actions...' (*ar-Rum*: 41). Then He sent His chastisement upon them as requital for what their hands wrought, saying: 'I answered the supplication you made against them. All of this only means that I am giving strength to your cause, and I will not desert you; and as long as this is the case, do not allow their plotting to affect you when they say to you, "Worship our gods for one year and we shall worship your God for one year."⁽¹⁾ But Allah *the Almighty* says:

(1) Concerning the revelation of the chapter of *al-Kafirun*, *Al-Wahidi* mentions that a group of *Quraysh* said, 'O Muhammad! Come, follow our religion, and we shall follow your religion: worship our gods for one year and we shall worship your God for one year.' *Al-Waqhidi, Asbab An-Nuzul*, p. 279

فَاقِمَّ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ الْقَيِّمِ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ يَوْمٌ لَا مَرَدَّ لَهُ، مِنْ اللَّهِ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَصْدَعُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

**[Prophet], stand firm in your devotion to the upright religion,
before an irresistible Day comes from God. On that Day,
mankind will be divided [43] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 43)**

Allah's saying: '[Prophet], stand firm in your devotion to the upright religion...' (*ar-Rum*: 43) means: 'Rest assured, O Muhammad, and devote your time to the Worship of Allah because I have promised to succour you, and I answered you when you said: "O Allah, bring down Your grievous wrath upon Mudarr, and send upon them years like the years Joseph (Yusuf) endured!"'⁽¹⁾, Allah *the Almighty* says: '...whether We The Forgiver show you part of what We have promised them in this life or whether We take your soul back to Us first, it is to Us that they will be returned. Retribution takes place – know that, in the end, it is unto Us that they will be brought back' (*Ghafir*: 77). That is, those who are not punished in this world will be punished in the next. He *the Almighty* says: 'Then turn thy face straight...' (*ar-Rum*: 43) because the face is the place of nobility and the foremost part of the human being. It is what shows man's honour. This is proved by the fact that prostration and humility before Allah *the Almighty* is expressed by placing one's face on the ground. This is why when you send someone with a message or give him a task which he will fulfil with his foot or his hand or his tongue, or any of his limbs, you say to him, 'I hope you will brighten my face!' This is because the face is foremost. An example of this is Allah's saying: '... everything will perish except His Face...' (*al-Qasas*: 88) because you only know people by their faces, and if someone wants to hide or conceal his identity, he can do so by simply covering his eyes so what if he covers his whole face? You do not identify someone by the back of his head, or his shoulders, or his leg, but rather by his face. The Arabic words *wajih* (notable) and *jaha* (high standing) both come from the word *wajh* (face).

(1) Abu Hurayra who said: 'When Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him raised his head from the final obeisance of the prayer, he said: O Allah, bring down Your Grievous Wrath upon Mudarr! O Allah, send upon them years like the years Joseph (Yusuf) endured!' Narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad (ii. 470, 502, 521), and by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (1006).

As long as He singled out the face, the noblest part of you, all the other parts of your body are included a fortiori in this, since they are subordinate to the face. Therefore, the meaning is: 'use your hand to do that which Allah has commanded you to do, and use your leg to go where Allah has commanded you to go, and occupy your heart with that which Allah commanded you to occupy it with, and set your eye upon that which Allah commanded you to behold, and so on.'

That is, make the most of the opportunity of your life: '...before an irresistible Day comes from Allah...' (*ar-Rum*: 43), namely; the Day of Resurrection, '...which cannot be averted...' (*ar-Rum*: 43). This means that when Allah brings it forth, no one will be able to wrest it from Allah, or take it from His hand, or prevent Him from bringing it forth; or, it means that once Allah *the Almighty* has decreed something, He does not go back on it or change it.

So, the words '...from Allah...' (*ar-Rum*: 43) give us both meanings, just as is the case with Allah's saying: 'each person has guardian angels before him and behind, watching over him by Allah's Command...' (*ar-Ra'd*: 11). How could these helpers protect him from Allah's Command? Scholars said that this means that their being angels of guardianship is a result of Allah's Command, and based on His command for them to guard. He then says: '...On that Day...' (*ar-Rum*: 43) that is, on the Day which cannot be held back from Allah, '...mankind will be divided' (*ar-Rum*: 43) those who banded together to fight you, oppose you, and hurt you and who conspired against you '...will be divided' (*ar-Rum*: 43). They will be separated from one another; a point which is frequently mentioned in many verses of the Quran.

The division is either one of faith and disbelief that is, the happy people and the unhappy people; or has to do with that which will take place amongst those who were obstinate and followed others into idolatry, for each of them will disown the other, as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'When those who have been followed disown their followers...' (*al-Baqara*: 166). Allah *the Almighty* then clarified for us the mode and cause of the division in the Hereafter, for He *the Almighty* does not wrong anyone. So, He then says:

مَنْ كَفَرَ فَعَلَيْهِ كُفْرُهُ، وَمَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَا نَفْسَ لَهُ يَمْهَدُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

Those who rejected the truth will bear the burden of that rejection, and those who did good deeds will have made good provision for themselves [44] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 44)

As long as the Resurrection is something from Allah and thus cannot be averted, let us pay heed to its consequences and make preparations for them. Those who disbelieved will have to bear the burden of this disbelief: it will be against them, not for them; and this is something which urges us to say in contrast: ‘and those who had faith will have their faith counted for them.’ After showing us the clear proofs of His Oneness in the universe and showing us the universal proofs in that regard, and giving us parables and details – after all this, He *the Almighty* said: ‘I will tell you that you have been given a choice, that is, I created within you the freedom to choose to fulfil responsibilities so that I would not force anyone to believe in Me.’ The creation of the freedom to choose to fulfil responsibilities, after we had been made compelled in other things, indicates that Allah does not want His servants to be mere shells which react to commands of compulsion, but rather, He wants people to be attracted by their loving instinct to The Unique One.

Otherwise, it would have been possible to create them all in a state of guidance, that is, in such a way to which disbelief would have nothing to do with, and they would be compelled to obey Him. In the Quran, He *the Almighty* gives examples of such creatures which have no ability to choose, saying: ‘...they said, “We come willingly”’ (*Fussilat*: 11). When Allah *the Almighty* spoke clearly about this matter, He said: ‘We offered the Trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, yet they refused to undertake it and were afraid of it ...’ (*al-Ahzab*: 72). This refusal was not based on arrogant rebellion against Allah’s Will, but rather, they thought objectively, saying, ‘We will not bear this trust because we do not trust ourselves, and we cannot guarantee that we would live up to it.’ Man is likewise subject to vicissitudes; he might bear the trust and be sure that he will live up to it at the moment he takes it on, and yet no longer be sure of himself when the time comes to live up to it. We gave the example for this before of someone who takes on a trust and welcomes it when he first takes it on, but then certain events of life overwhelm him so he

is forced to usurp this trust: even though he originally intended to return it, when the time comes, he cannot do so. Another person foresees this responsibility and so refuses to take on the trust; and this is the intelligent one who foresees changing circumstances and conditions. It is well known that a trust is not written down; if you write it down and have it witnessed, it is no longer a trust. A trust, therefore, is down to the free choice of the one who is trusted: if he wills, he can acknowledge it and if he wills, he can deny it. Allah *the Almighty* tells us that the heavens, the earth, and mountains ‘...refused to undertake it and were afraid of it...’ (*al-Ahzab*: 72) because they foresaw their responsibility. As for man, he was offered the chance to take on the trust and thus said, ‘I have an intellect with which to think, and I can choose between alternatives, and I will fulfil the trust.’ He gave a guarantee at the time when he assumed the trust, but not when the time came to fulfil it; and thereby he wronged himself and was ignorant of the nature of things. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘...Mankind undertook it, they have always been inept and foolish’ (*al-Ahzab*: 72). He was wicked to himself, and foolishly ignorant of the vicissitudes that could come to him. As long as man is subject to vicissitudes, he does not remain in the same state, which is why we said that if a person climbs to the top of a mountain, and he is subject to vicissitudes, there is nothing else for him to do but to go back down. Wise people fear to be given blessings which are complete because there is nothing after completion except decline, as the poet said:

If something is completed, it begins to decline:

Look out for waning when you hear, ‘It is complete!’

If you say, ‘Why did Allah create free will in man and not in the other genera which serve Him including minerals, plants and animals?’, we say in reply: ‘Be precise, and understand that they were also given their choice, when He says: “We offered the Trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, yet they refused to undertake it and were afraid of it...”’ (*al-Ahzab*: 72).’ So, these genera were also offered the choice of free will, but they made a single choice which sufficed them of the need to make any further choices: they said, ‘O Allah, we want to be subjugated to Your every Will.’ Since we have free will, Allah *the Almighty* conveyed to us this matter: ‘those who rejected the truth will bear the burden of that rejection...’ (*ar-Rum*: 44). The words: ‘...will

bear...’ (*ar-Rum*: 44) refer to debt and burden, whilst the words: ‘...will have for them...’ (*ar-Rum*: 44) indicate benefit; so if we wanted to state the contrast of this, we would say, ‘And those who have faith will have for them [the good of] their faith’, as in the saying of Allah: ‘The good will live in bliss, [13] and the wicked will burn in the Fire [14]’ (*al-Infitar*: 13-14). But the Quran does not make this contrast here; rather it moves to another matter: ‘... and those who did good deeds will have made good provision for themselves’ (*ar-Rum*: 44). Why is this? Scholars said it is because the benefit of faith is that you believe in the existence of a single all-powerful deity, namely, Allah, and you have faith in Him, so you should obey if He commands you. The reason for faith is therefore one of moral responsibility, so when you approach any responsibility, do not look for the reason for it; instead say: ‘He *the Almighty* made me responsible for doing such-and-such, and the reason and wisdom of this responsibility are known to Him.’

If we say, for example, that the wisdom behind fasting is that the rich person feels and experiences the pain of hunger and therefore feels compassion for the poor: does this mean that the poor and the needy do not have to fast? So, this is not the wisdom behind fasting, and it is better to say: ‘I fast because Allah wants me to fast, and the wisdom of fasting is known to Him.’ We gave an example to illustrate this – and Allah is beyond compare: when you complain of a pain or an illness, you ask after a skilled and specialist doctor until you find him, whereupon the role of your intelligence comes to an end and you place yourself in his hands, while he examines you, diagnoses your ailment and prescribes for you treatment. You do not object to anything he does, and you do not ask him why he prescribed this medicine.

If a visitor, for example, asked you why you are taking this medicine, you would not say, ‘Because it has such-and-such properties, and such-and-such effects’, but rather, you would say, ‘Because the doctor prescribed it for me’ even though the doctor is a human being who could make a mistake, and he might prescribe for you a medicine or give you a shot which kills you; yet you trust him in whatever he sees is best for you. If you do not question the doctor, when he is subject to error, how could you question Allah in what He obliges you to do, and ask for a reason for everything?

No one is questioned about why he does things except by an equal to him; no one questions a doctor except another doctor like him. In this way, we must trust Allah about the reasons and wisdom for things until there is an equal to Him who can question Him.

Allah *the Almighty* explains to us that the reason for faith – not faith itself – is obedience to the commandments of Allah; and the harmony of the created order depends on obedience of these commandments. This is proved by the fact that Allah tells the believers to spread the call and pass it on to others, and to fight those who oppose it and prevent its spread. The sword was not used by Islam for any reason other than to protect the spread of the call; if they leave it alone, leave them alone. This is proved by the fact that the countries which Islam conquered still contain followers of other religions who remained adherent to their religions, which shows that Islam did not force anyone to embrace it. But as long as Islam had conquered a land, it necessarily had to be dominant in this land, and everyone had to live in adherence to Allah's way of guidance so that the same applied to the disbeliever and the irreligious as applied to the religious. It is as though Allah *the Almighty* wants His laws to govern whether you believe in them or not because the soundness of the universe can only be ensured by these laws. So you are free to choose whether to believe or not, but those who believe are required to protect the call so it can be passed on, and then to leave people free: if someone believes, it is a splendid blessing for him; and if someone rejects, we say to him: what is for us is for you, and what is required from us is required from you. So the basis of faith is the soundness of man's succession. Allah *the Almighty* is not concerned whether you believe or not as long as the way of this succession is established; and the benefit of this way goes to both the believer and the disbeliever. If faith coaches a person so that he only does what is good and sound, the disbeliever will inevitably benefit from this soundness. Did the Sacred Law say to the believer: 'Do not steal from believers'? No, it also told him not to steal from the disbeliever; and so on. In the sight of Allah's way of guidance, all are equal. There is a verse in the Quran to which we must pay attention, and inform the non-believers of, so they will know that faith protects the interest of all people, which is Allah's saying: 'We have sent

down the Scripture to you [Prophet] with the truth so that you can judge between people in accordance with what Allah has shown you. Do not be an advocate for those who betray trust [105]. Ask Allah for forgiveness... [106]' (*an-Nisa'*: 105-106). That is, if it occurs to you to be on the side of the false, seek Allah's forgiveness for this: '...Allah does not love anyone given to treachery and sin' (*an-Nisa'*: 107) even if they are believers.

This verse has a famous story behind it, the story of the Jew named Zayd ibn As-Samin, to whom came Ta'ma ibn Ubayriq⁽¹⁾ – who was a believer – and said, 'O Zayd, keep this shield as a trust for me.' Zayd consented to do this, but the shield was actually stolen, as Ibn Ubayriq had stolen it from Qatada ibn An-Nu'man⁽²⁾ and placed it in a sack of flour. The shield was marked by the flour, and when Ibn An-Nu'man searched for his shield, the track of flour led him to the house of Ibn As-Samin, the Jew, so he accused him of stealing it. They then brought him to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to pass judgement on him, and he told him about how Ibn Ubayriq had given the shield to him as a trust. Upon this, it was a grave matter for the Muslims that one of them could have stolen, and that the Jews would have something for which to castigate them. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* began to turn the matter over in his mind; if he judged against the Muslim, the Jews would make an argument out of it, whilst if he judged in favour of the Muslim, it would be a blemish and a disgrace for the religion. So, Allah assisted him by means of this verse: 'We have sent down the Scripture to you [Prophet] with the truth so that you can judge between people in accordance with what Allah has shown you. Do not be an advocate for those who betray trust' (*an-Nisa'*: 105). And He said: '...between people...' (*an-Nisa'*: 105) not only 'between believers.'

(1) *The story of the Jew Zayd ibn As-Samin and his accusation of stealing a shield.*

(2) *Qatada ibn An-Nu'man ibn Zayd Al-Ansari Al-Awsi was a Companion who fought at Badr, one of the most valiant, and was a famous archer. He accompanied Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him on all his great campaigns, and bore the flag of Bani Dhafir on the day of the Mecca Conquest. He died in Medina in the year 23 AH at the age of 65. He was the half-brother of Abu Sa'id Al-Khudari on his mother's side. See Az-Zirikli, Al-A'lam, p. 189.*

Although some scholars said that Allah's saying: '...Do not be an advocate for those who betray trust' (*an-Nisa'*: 105) means 'do not oppose those who are false lest they persecute you'; it actually means: 'do not be a contender for those who are false'. Allah's saying: 'Ask Allah for forgiveness...' (*an-Nisa'*: 106) means that if the matter of Islam and its image amongst the non-Muslims occurs to your mind, Allah does not love those who are treacherous and sinful. If the non-Muslims were to become aware of this matter, and saw that Allah was All Just in the Judgement He gave to the believers, and conveyed this to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and that He showed the absolute truth, and that in His sight all are equal whether believer or non-believer, they would know that Islam is the true religion and they would embrace it. This is why the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Whoever transgresses against a non-Muslim citizen *dhimmi*, I will contend (for him) against them on the Day of Resurrection.'⁽¹⁾ This is because if you transgress against him and persecute him, or threaten his life, his dignity, or his wealth, he will then have a reason not to believe, and will be able to say, 'If this is the state of the believers, what is so special about Islam that would make me embrace it? Rather, it is in my interest to stay away from it.' But if you treat him with truth, goodness, and virtue, you will cause him to become attached to Islam and to censure himself for not being a believer. This is why we said before that a man came to our master Abraham (Ibrahim) *peace be upon him* who sensed that he was not a believer; and when he asked him, he said, 'I am a Magian', he closed the door in his face; so the man went away. But then Abraham (Ibrahim) *peace be upon him* received revelation from Allah, saying: 'O Abraham (Ibrahim), you did not consent to grant him hospitality because he does not follow your religion; yet I have accepted him his whole life to dwell in My dominion, even though he disbelieves in Me.'

(1) Narrated by Abu Dawud in his *Sunnan* (3053) on the authority of several sons of Companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who heard from their fathers that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Indeed, whosoever harms one who is protected by a treaty, or degrades him, or makes him do more than he is able to, or takes anything from him without consent, I will argue (for him) against them on the Day of Resurrection.' As-Sakhawi said in *Al-Maqasid Al-Hasana*: 'Its chain of transmission is unobjectionable, and it does not matter that the sons of the Companions were not named since they were of a number which makes up for this.'

So Abraham (Ibrahim) *peace be upon him*⁽¹⁾ rushed after the man until he caught up with him and appeased him. ‘What has happened,’ said the man, ‘after you sent me away and rebuffed me only moments ago?’ He said, ‘Allah rebuked me for your sake.’ The man said, ‘A Lord who rebukes His prophets for the sake of His enemies is truly worthy of worship! There is no deity but Allah, and Abraham (Ibrahim) is the Messenger of Allah!’

So we can understand from this that righteous action is the requirement of faith; if you believe in a God whose rulings you take and who you are certain is a true God, it does not then matter whether you believe or not; what matters is the basis of soundness in the universe and in the motions of life. This is why He did not say, ‘and those who have faith will have for them [the good of] their faith’, as though the meaning of faith is action. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘...and those who did good deeds will have made good provision for themselves’ (*ar-Rum*: 44). That is because he would not do what is right and just if he was not a believer. We can notice here that the verse first speaks in the singular. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘those who rejected the truth will bear the burden of that rejection, and those who did good deeds...’ (*ar-Rum*: 44), and then it switches to the plural: ‘...will have made good provision for themselves’ (*ar-Rum*: 44). He did not say, ‘...Will have made good provision for himself.’ Why is this?

Scholars said it is because the one who does good deeds does not do them for himself alone, but rather for himself and his offspring who come after him, as Allah *the Almighty* says elsewhere: ‘We unite the believers with their offspring who followed them in faith...’ (*at-Tur*: 21). So when He spoke about faith, He used the Arabic singular form, yet when He spoke about reward He used the plural form.

Moreover, good deeds come from a person’s being and he also receives them from others. The Arabic word *man* which here means: ‘...those who...’ (*ar-Rum*: 44) can be used for the singular, dual, and plural in both their forms, and can be used in place of all the different personal pronouns: you can use the Arabic word *man* to mean ‘he who’, or ‘she who’, or ‘they who’ in the

(1) *The story of Abraham (Ibrahim) peace be upon him and his guest the fire worshiper*

dual form, or 'they who' in the plural form, and so on. In this way, the verse uses the word *man* to indicate both the singular and the plural.

Reflect on Allah's saying: '...When you enter any house, greet yourselves...' (*an-Nur*: 61). The word *anfusakum* literally means 'yourselves.' Does a person greet himself? Scholars said yes, because the believers are a single entity, and if you greet one of them it is as though you have greeted them all. Also, if you say to your friend, 'Peace be upon you', he replies 'Upon you be peace', so it is as though you have given greetings of peace to yourself. The word *yamhadun*: '...will have made good provision...' (*ar-Rum*: 44) is derived from the root word *mahd* which means 'cradle'; the baby does not lay out his own cradle and spread it smooth and prepare it, but he must have a loving carer to spread it out for him and lay it and prepare it. It is as though the one who does righteous deeds in this world thereby prepares a bed for himself in the Hereafter. Abu Mansur ibnul-Hazim related that Abu 'Abdullah ibn Al-Hussayn said: 'The righteous deed proceeds ahead of the one who does it to paradise, where it lays out his bed for him, just as a servant lays out a bed for someone.'

This is why we said before that those who put others before themselves thereby sacrifice things of the ephemeral world in order to store them up in the eternal world. When our master the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was given a ram as a gift and went back later to ask the Mother of the Believers 'A'isha *Allah be pleased with her* about it, he *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'What did you do with the ram? she said, 'It is all gone, save its shoulder' meaning that she gave all of it away as charity except the shoulder, whereupon our master the Messenger of Allah, *peace and Blessings be upon him*, said: 'Rather, it all remains, save its shoulder.'⁽¹⁾ In another Hadith, he *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'O Son of Adam, you say, "My wealth, my wealth!" – yet do you have any wealth save that you spend it on clothes and thereby wear it out, or spend it on food and thereby put an end to it, or give it in charity and thereby preserve it?'⁽²⁾ Someone asked Imam 'Ali *Allah be*

(1) Narrated by Ahmad in his *Musnad* (vi. 50), *At-Tirmidhi* in his *Sunnan*, p. 2470, on the authority of 'A'isha; *At-Tirmidhi* declared it to be rigorously authentic.

(2) Narrated by Imam Ahmad in his *Musnad* (iv. 24, 26); *Muslim* in his *Sahih* (2908), and *At-Tirmidhi* in his *Sunnan* (2342); he declared it to be rigorously authentic.

pleased with him: ‘Am I one of the people of this world, or the people of the Hereafter?’ The Imam said: ‘You yourself have the answer to this question.’ He said, ‘How?’ He said: ‘Suppose one person comes to you with a gift, and another person comes to ask you for charity: which of them will you greet the most warmly? If you would give a warm welcome to the one who gives to you, you are of the people of this world; and if you would give a warm welcome to the one who takes from you, you are of the people of the Hereafter.’ This is because a man loves that which gives him more of his beloved: if he is one of the people of this worldly life, he will love that which gives him more of it; and if he is one of the people of the Hereafter, he will love that which gives him more in his Hereafter.

Allah *the Almighty* then tells us why they will have made good provision for themselves:

لِيَجْزِيَ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ ۚ إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾

From His bounty God will reward those who believe and do good deeds; He does not like those who reject the truth [45] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 45)

He mentioned faith here, saying: ‘from His bounty Allah will reward those who believe...’ (*ar-Rum*: 45), and then: ‘...and do good deeds...’ (*ar-Rum*: 45) so that no one would think that perhaps righteous deeds are sufficient on their own without the need for faith, This is something which has incensed many philosophers, who have said: ‘How can a disbelieving man who does good deeds not be rewarded for them?’ I say to this: ‘He was indeed rewarded for his good deeds, but in this world, because he did not act for the sake of Allah, but rather, he acted for the sake of fame and celebrity, and from them he attained honour and fame, and his memory was immortalised, and they made statues of him, and so on. As for the reward of the Hereafter, it is for those who act sincerely for the countenance of Allah.

The Quran alerts us to this issue and says: ‘Beware of being deceived by those who act only for the sake of this worldly life’, affirming: ‘and We shall turn to the deeds they have done and scatter them like dust’ (*al-Furqan*: 23). It was narrated in a Hadith: ‘You did it so that such-and-such would be said

about you; and it was said.'⁽¹⁾ Yes, you built a mosque, but you wrote upon it 'built by so-and-so, and opened by so-and-so', and so on. So what are you waiting for after this? Your Lord wants you to devote your actions sincerely to His countenance, as a Hadith says, '...And a man who gave charity and concealed it so that his left hand did not know what his right hand gave.'⁽²⁾

So Allah's saying: 'From His bounty Allah will reward those who believe...' (*ar-Rum*: 45) indicates that if a deed is truly righteous, it will benefit its doer in this world, but it will not benefit him in the Hereafter unless it is based on faith in Allah; and therefore faith is linked with righteous action so that neither can do without the other.

The saying of Allah: '...from His bounty...' (*ar-Rum*: 45) means 'as a grace from Allah', so that no one is deceived by his actions, thinking that he found salvation because of them; and this is a point of contention amongst the scholars, who say that the Quran here says: '...out of His bounty...' (*ar-Rum*: 45), yet elsewhere it says: '...Enter the Garden as a reward for what you have done' (*an-Nahl*: 32) which implies that it is your right to enter it because of the works you offered. So is paradise the right of the believers, or is it a grace from Allah?

I say: 'who benefits from the actions for which Allah holds the believers responsible?' They benefit man, and Allah draws no benefit from them

(1) *Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him related that the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said: 'The first of people to be judged on the Day of Resurrection will be a man who was martyred. He will be brought forward, and shown his blessings, and he will acknowledge them. (Allah) will say: 'What did you do with them?' He will say: 'I fought in Your cause until I was martyred.' He will say: 'You have lied; you fought so it would be said: (He is) brave; and it was said.' Then, He will order for him to be dragged away on his face, and thrown in the fire. Then, a man who studied, and taught, and recited the Quran, will be brought forth, and shown his blessings, and he will acknowledge them. He will say: 'What did you do with them?' He will say: 'I studied, and taught, and recited the Quran for Your sake.' He will say: 'You have lied; you studied so that it would be said: scholar, and you recited the Quran so it would be said: He is a reciter; and it was said.' Then He will order for him to be dragged away on his face, and thrown in the fire....' Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih, 1905; An-Nasa'i in his Sunnan.*

(2) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (1031) on the authority of Abu Hurayra, as part of the Hadith which begins: 'There are seven whom Allah will cover with His shade on a Day when there is no shade save His....'*

because He has the attributes of Absolute Perfection, and had them even before He created man.

This is why He said in the Sacred Hadith, ‘O My servants! If the first of you and the last of you, and the human and the jinn of you, were as pious as the heart of the most pious man among you, it would not increase My dominion even as much as a gnat’s wing. And if the first of you and the last of you, and the human and the jinn of you were as wicked as the heart of the most wicked man among you, it would not decrease My dominion even as much as a gnat’s wing. And if the first of you and the last of you, and the human and the jinn of you, stood on one hilltop, and all asked Me what they wanted, and I gave it to them, it would not decrease what I have, except as a needle does if one of you dips it into the sea. This is because I am Munificent, and Glorious, and Wealthy; My bestowal is speech, and My torment is speech: My command to that which I will is no more than that I say to it, “Be!”, and it is.’⁽¹⁾

And Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘What you have runs out but what Allah has endures...’ (*an-Nahl*: 96). So actions of religious responsibility are for man’s own good, even if on the surface they seem to constrict his movements. For example, he may wish to steal and increase his wealth, but we hold him back and prevent him, saying to him: Reflect that we have prevented you from stealing, and you are only one person; and we have prevented all people from stealing from you. Therefore, you are the one who benefits from Allah’s way of guidance; so do not look at what responsibility takes from you, but rather look at what this responsibility gives you from others. As long as all responsibility is for your own benefit and good, if Allah rewards you for it after this, it is a grace from Allah to you. It is like when you say to your son, for example, ‘If you succeed, I will give you such-and-such’, even though he is the one who will benefit from his success, so any reward you give him after this is an act of grace.

(1) Narrated by Ahmad in his *Musnad* (v. 77, 153) and At-Tirmidhi in his *Sunnan* (2495) on the authority of Abu Dharr. At-Tirmidhi said: ‘This Hadith is sound; its chain of transmission includes Shahr ibn Hawshab, whom some have declared weak, though Al-Bukhari considered his narrations of Hadith sound and declared him to be strong.’

Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* loves for His servant to do his work well, and to exert his effort therein; for this reason, He gives us recompense for it even though we are the ones who benefit from it.

He *the Almighty* says: 'on that Day, Allah will pay them their just due in full...' (*an-Nur*: 25) making it a matter of justice due on His part, just as He says: '...We make it Our duty to help the believers' (*ar-Rum*: 47). If we consider the word 'due' philosophically, we find that every right which is due to you is contrasted by a duty incumbent upon someone else; it can only be your just due if it is someone else's duty. This means that your just due here is a duty for Allah; yet a duty must be obliged by someone, and who could oblige a duty on Allah? No one, but rather, He obliged it on Himself.

So the just due which He gave you is an act of grace from Him, and it is a just due for you because He has made it so; it is like the person who has no right to inherit, so someone is gracious with him and writes him a bequest from his assets so that he comes to have a rightful just due, which he can legally demand from the heirs because the benefactor was gracious with him and assigned a just due to him.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: '...He does not like those who reject the truth' (*ar-Rum*: 45). We notice that this verse speaks about the reward of the believers; so what occasions the mention of the disbelievers here? Scholars said it is because Allah wants to alert His disbelieving servant's attention to faith and its distinctions, as though He is saying to him: 'Come to faith so you can attain to this reward.'

An example to illustrate this – and Allah is beyond compare: a man with three sons promises to give a gift to the ones who succeed in their studies, and at the end of the year, two of them succeed and take their gifts, whilst the third, who fails, feels bad and wishes he has done what his brothers have done

Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* does not love the disbelievers because He loves for all men to be believers so they can obtain the reward of faith; for all are His servants, and He is more merciful with them than a mother is with her child, and they are His creations and His handiwork; and have you ever seen an artisan break his handiwork and smash it? So Allah is concerned for His servants, even the disbeliever amongst them.

A Qudsi Hadith states that the sky said, “O Lord, allow me to fall in pieces upon the Son of Adam, for he desires Your goodness, yet neglects to thank You.” The earth said, “O Lord, allow me to swallow up the Son of Adam, for he desires Your goodness, yet neglects to thank You.” And the mountains said: “O Lord, allow me to fall upon the Son of Adam, for he desires Your goodness, yet neglects to thank You.” And the oceans will say: “O Lord, allow me to drown the Son of Adam, for he desires Your goodness, yet neglects to thank You.” And what did The Lord and Creator say to them all? “Leave Me with that which I created; for had you created them, you would have been merciful to them. If they repent to Me, I am their Beloved; and if they do not repent, I am their Doctor.”⁽¹⁾ This is why Allah rejoices in the repentance of His servant when he comes back to Him after having turned away; and our master the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* gives us a parable to illustrate this when he says: ‘Allah rejoices at the repentance of His believing servant more than one of you does when he comes across the camel which he had lost in the wilderness.’⁽²⁾ That is to say that Allah *the Almighty* wants all His Slaves to be prosperous and to be qualified to receive His Grace and Bounty, which is why He *Glorified is He* does not like the disbelievers who throw themselves into destruction and thereby go against the Divine Will for all mankind.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

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- (1) Abu Hamid al-Ghazali narrated it in *Ihya’ ‘Ulum Ad-Din* as a saying of one of the early Muslims with the wording: ‘No servant commits sin save that the earth upon which he stands asks permission to swallow him up, and the sky which covers him asks permission to fall upon him in pieces; so Allah says to the earth and the sky: “Leave My servants and give them respite, for you did not create them; and had you created them, you would have mercy on them. Perhaps he may repent to Me in which case I shall forgive him; and perhaps he will become righteous instead in which case I will make his deeds righteous instead.”’
- (2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (6309) and by Muslim in his Sahih (2747), on the authority of Anas ibn Malik, and the wording here is that of Al-Bukhari.* The meaning of ‘comes across his camel’ is that he unexpectedly finds it without having been looking for it, getting it back after it had been lost to him. ‘Wilderness’ means barren desert.

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ يُرْسِلَ الرِّيحَ مُبَشِّرَاتٍ وَلِيُذِيقَكُمْ مِنْ رَحْمَتِهِ وَلِتَجْرِيَ
الْفُلُكُ بِأَمْرِهِ وَلِتَبْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

**Another of His signs is that He sends out the winds
bearing good news, giving you a taste of His grace,
making the ships sail at His command, enabling you to
[journey in] search of His bounty so that you may be
grateful [46] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 46)**

These are five of the blessings which Allah gives to His servants. Sending forth the winds is itself a blessing, and their bearing the glad tidings of rain is a blessing, and the sailing of ships is a blessing, and to quest after Allah's bounties is a blessing, and then to give thanks for all of this is another blessing.

Ayat (wonders) is the plural of the Arabic word *aya*, which, as we said, means something amazing which will surely draw one's gaze, and of which one will not be heedless for even the blink of an eye. This is why we say in Arabic that so-and-so is 'a wonder of eloquence', or 'a wonder of beauty', and so on.

The word *Ayat* can mean three things: the wonders of the universe which point to the Maker and affirm the omnipotent power of the Creator: 'the night, the day, the sun, the moon, are only a few of His signs...' (*Fussilat*: 37). The word *Ayat* also means the miracles which accompany the Messengers to prove that they are truly sent by Allah to deliver His Message. Then there are the *Ayat* which convey the Sacred Law and its rulings, namely; the *Ayat* of the Noble Quran, which convey unto us Allah's way of guidance. Here, Allah *the Almighty* is speaking about the wonders of the universe: 'another of His signs is that He sends out the winds bearing good news...' (*ar-Rum*: 46). The word *riyah* is the plural of *rih*, and here it is used in its general meaning of 'air' which takes several forms: there is still air; Allah *the Almighty* says: 'if He willed, He could bring the wind to a standstill...' (*ash-Shura*: 33). And the still air is uncomfortable for a person because it makes it difficult for him to breathe, so he has to bring the air to himself either with his hand or with a fan. Why? In order to renew the oxygen in the air around him so that he can breathe. Sometimes air is so hot that it scorches the face; other times it comes

as a breeze which is cool, refreshing, and pleasant; other times it comes as a destructive hurricane, and so on.

Allah *the Almighty* – as we explained before – arrayed the constituents of life for the creatures of earth in the following order: air, then water, then food, according to the importance of each constituent. Air is the most important constituent of life for living beings, since a man cannot do without it for more than the short time it takes to breathe in and out, and if it is withheld from him he will die. Then there is water, which a man can do without for up to ten days; then there is food, which he can do without for a month.

For this reason, the wisdom of the Creator decreed that He did not give possession of air to anyone; if air belonged to someone and he was angry with you, you would die before he became pleased with you. As for water, people rarely own it; and as for food, people frequently own it because a person can go without it for a long time which gives him a chance to earn it and contrive a way to get it; or on the other hand, the heart of the one who owns the food might soften so that he gives it to you.

This is why we hear people saying, by way of threat, ‘By Allah, I will stop his breath!’ It is as though this is the cruellest thing that can be done; because you might stop him from getting water or food without him dying, but if you stop him from breathing this will be the end of him; and this is the quickest way of killing a person and the easiest and the one which leaves the least trace, since no blood spills because of it, nor are any injuries caused; it takes nothing but a cloth soaked with water. So air is an important constituent of life and security.

We said that if air is cut off or is still, the oxygen in it is not renewed and this makes a person uncomfortable because his breaths are restricted. If there is a foul smell in a room, everyone is quick to shout, ‘Open the window!’ Why? So the air is renewed.

So sending forth the winds is a blessing in itself; and if they bear coolness and you feel their moisture, they give you glad tidings of rain; this is why the Arabs used to know of rain before it fell, and they could predict the course of the clouds which would bring rain. So the glad tidings of rain is another blessing.

In these two blessings, the sending forth of winds and the sending down of rain, man plays no part: '...giving you a taste of His grace...' (*ar-Rum*: 46), that is, through rain. As for the wonder of ships: '...making the ships sail at His command...' (*ar-Rum*: 46), the sailing is ascribed to the ships because man has a hand in them and plays a part in them, as he makes them and sets them on their course at Allah's behest: '...to [journey in] search of His bounty so that you may be grateful' (*ar-Rum*: 46). That is, you travel in the sea to fish and seek provision, or even for fun and tourism.

So the wonders in which man plays no part are ascribed to Allah Alone, whilst if man has something to do with them He ascribes them to him, as is the case when He says: 'Consider [the semen] you eject. [58] Do you create it yourselves or are We the Creator? [59] We ordained death to be among you. Nothing could stop Us [60] if We intended to change you and recreate you in a way unknown to you [61]' (*al-Waqi'a*: 58-61). So He gave us the blessing of life, and then mentioned that which causes it to end, so that we would not receive life with delusion. And since man plays no part in the wonder of life and the wonder of death, it was enough for Him to ask the question: 'do you create it yourselves or are We the creator?' (*al-Waqi'a*: 59) and no one could say, 'I created.'

As for the wonder of farming, He ascribes farming to man, since he has much to do with this wonder when he ploughs, sows, irrigates, and so on. This is why when He came to speak of the end of this blessing, He said: '... indeed, if We wished, We could turn your harvest into chaff...' (*al-Waqi'a*: 65) using the word 'indeed' to emphasise the verb, so that you would not be deluded by the part you play in farming.

As for the matter of water, He did not use this emphasis because water is a blessing which man has nothing to do with, so when He spoke of its end He said: 'If We wanted, We could make it bitter...' (*al-Waqi'a*: 70) without any extra emphasis.

The fifth blessing is: '...so that you may be grateful' (*ar-Rum*: 46), and this blessing is the treasure and stronghold of all blessings; for if you thank Allah for the blessings He gives you, He gives you even more: 'Remember that He promised, "If you are thankful, I will give you more"...' (*Ibrahim*: 7).

After this, Allah *the Almighty* consoles His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying:

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ رُسُلًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِمْ فَجَاءَهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَأَنكَرْنَا
مِنَ الَّذِينَ أَجْرَمُوا وَكَانَ حَقًّا عَلَيْنَا نَصْرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾

Before you [Muhammad], We sent messengers, each to their own people: they brought them clear proofs and then We punished the evildoers. We make it Our duty to help the believers [47] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 47)

This means: ‘O Prophet Muhammad, if your call has made you tired and you have encountered harassment, obstinacy, injury, plotting and scheming from the leaders of Quraysh. We have given you succour despite all this; and take as an example your brothers from the previous Messengers who were exposed to the like of that which you are exposed to, yet did We give Our Messengers over to their enemies? So rest assured that they will not have any success over you.’ The meaning of the saying of Allah: ‘...they brought them clear proofs...’ (*ar-Rum*: 47) refers to the miracles which proved that they were truly sent by Allah to deliver His Message; yet despite this, their people did not believe in them and lied to them. As for the Saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘...and then We punished the evildoers...’ (*ar-Rum*: 47), there is an abridgment of something which can be understood from the context; the Quran did not say that the people lied, but rather, it directly went to the consequence of this denial, affirming: ‘...and then We punished...’ (*ar-Rum*: 47). This style of abridgment can be clearly seen in the story of the hoopoe of Solomon (Sulaiman) when Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Take this letter of mine and deliver it to them, then withdraw and see what answer they send back’ (*an-Naml*: 28) and then follows it up immediately by saying: ‘The Queen of Sheba said, “Counsellors, a gracious letter has been delivered to me”’ (*an-Naml*: 29), leaving out the events which took place between the two statements since they can be clearly understood from the context; this is one of the aspects of the rhetorical style of the Noble Quran. The previous nations’ denial of the signs brought to them by the Messengers is a proof that they were people of corruption, and that they wanted to benefit from this corruption. So it was natural that they

opposed the Messengers who came to bring an end to this corruption, and that they persecuted them, so that Allah *the Almighty* had to protect His Messengers: '...and then We punished the evildoers...' (*ar-Rum*: 47). Then He affirms this matter: '...We make it Our Duty to help the believers' (*ar-Rum*: 47). Allah would not send a Messenger and then leave him to the mercy of his enemies, or abandon him, which is why He *the Almighty* says elsewhere in the Quran: 'Our word has already been given to Our servants the messengers: [171] it is they who will be helped, [172] and the ones who support Our cause will be the winners' [173] (*as-Saffat*: 171-173). We said before that it is not appropriate to look into these forces and ask: 'Was this soldier sincere in defending Islam, or was he not?' Rather, look at the results; if he was victorious, this means that the force of faith in him was sincere; if not, then he must look at himself and search for the meaning of the defeat against Islam in his own soul; for if he were truly one of Allah's Forces, the principle of 'and the ones who support Our cause will be the winners' (*as-Saffat*: 173) would have been applied to him; the Forces of Allah can only be defeated if one of the necessary attributes of these forces is missing. Reflect, for example, on what happened at the battle of Uhud, when the Muslims were defeated – although the word 'defeated' here is not completely accurate since the battle was a draw – they found success at first, but the end was not in their favour because the archers disobeyed the command of Allah's Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*⁽¹⁾ so

(1) *Al-Bayhaqi narrated in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa* (iii. 209), on the authority of Musa ibn 'Uqba, as part of a long Hadith: 'The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* selected fifty archers and instructed them to face the cavalry of the enemy, and appointed 'Abdullah ibn Jubayr to be their commander, and said to them: 'Archers, once we have taken our positions, if you see the cavalry of the idolaters galloping and the enemies of Allah fleeing, do not leave your positions. I implore you, let no man amongst you leave his post; keep the cavalry from us. He *peace and blessings be upon him* strongly advised them not to leave their places, yet all that which befell and afflicted Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that day was a result of their disobedience. When the fifty archers saw that Allah the Almighty had given victory to their brethren, they said: 'By Allah, we are sitting here for no reason; Allah has destroyed the enemy and our brethren are in the midst of the idolaters' troops!' And some of them said, 'Why should we keep rank when Allah has put the enemy to flight?' So they left the posts which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had implored them not to leave, and they contended and failed as a result of their disobedience to his *peace and blessings be upon him* orders.

they were defeated after they had achieved victory in the very beginning. O Muslim, would it have pleased you if the Muslims had been victorious after disobeying their Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*? By Allah, had they been victorious despite their disobedience to his command, all of his proceeding commands would not have been taken seriously, and they would have said, ‘We disobeyed his command and were yet victorious.’ So the meaning of this is that Muslims were not defeated, but rather, the defeatism within them was defeated, and Islam was victorious by the truth of its principles. Likewise, on the day of Hunayn of which Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘...even on the day of the Battle of Hunayn. You were well pleased with your large numbers...’ (*at-Tawba*: 25). Even Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* said: ‘We shall not be defeated today by such a small force’; yet at first they were almost defeated, but the matter was, as you say, a case of ‘The Lord took pity on them’, so He *the Almighty* sent tranquillity upon them, and it was His Will to forgive them for this mistake for Abu Bakr’s sake.

So Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘... We make it Our Duty to help the believers.’ (*ar-Rum*: 47). Yes, indeed, to succour the believers is a duty upon Allah, which He has made incumbent upon Himself; and it is an act of grace from Him, just as the benefactor is gracious with his wealth by leaving a bequest to someone. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

اللَّهُ الَّذِي يُرْسِلُ الرِّيحَ فَتُثِيرُ سَحَابًا فَيَبْسُطُهُ فِي السَّمَاءِ كَيْفَ يَشَاءُ وَيَجْعَلُهُ كَسَفًا
فَتَرَى الْوَدْقَ يَخْرُجُ مِنْ خِلَالِهِ فَإِذَا أَصَابَ بِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ إِذَا هُمْ يَسْتَبْشِرُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

**It is God who sends out the winds; they stir up the clouds;
He spreads them over the skies as He pleases; He makes
them break up and you see the rain falling from them. See
how they rejoice when He makes it fall upon whichever of
His servants He wishes[48] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 48)**

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* gives us a detailed reminder of the process of the wind’s motions, and the propulsion of the clouds, as well as the sending down of rain. When the word ‘winds’ is used in the plural, this indicates goodness, as when He *the Almighty* says: ‘We send the winds to fertilise...’ (*al-Hijr*: 22). That is the winds fertilise plants by taking from them the male spores and

dropping them into the females; one of the amazing things about this process is that you see both male and female in a single stalk, as is the case with maize, for example: the crest, the highest part of the stalk, contains the male pollen, whilst in the small shoots, which come out of the cob connected to the seeds, are found the female parts; and with the motions of the winds, the pollen falls from above and lands on these shoots, which is why the seeds connected to it will grow, whilst the ones, which the pollen does not reach, will die. This is why we can observe that the stalks which are directly facing the wind or the sea tend to give lower yields than the ones behind them. Why? Because the wind carries their pollen to the other stalks behind them so that their yield increases. If we know that some plants have both male and female elements such as the date palm and the sycamore, for example, where are the male and female elements of wheat, the guava, and the banana trees? When they studied these pollen seeds, they found that every seed, no matter how small it is, contains tiny cilia like velvet which are scattered in the wind and then carried to distant places. This is why you see mountains and deserts becoming verdant after a fall of rain; here arises the question, 'Who planted those seeds there?' It was the winds, which fertilise by the power of the Creator. We have thus to reflect on Allah's saying: 'If He pleases, He causes the wind to become still so that they lie motionless on its back...' (*ash-Shura*: 33), that is, the ships which sail by the force of the winds remain motionless on the surface of the water without anything to move them. If you say, 'How can we understand this matter now, in view of ships nowadays sailing by steam power, or diesel, or electricity, and no longer needing wind?'

We say: 'One of the meanings of *rih* 'wind' is air, and it also means power in general, as in the case when Allah *the Almighty* says: '...and do not quarrel for then you will be weak in hearts and your power (*rih*) will depart...' (*al-Anfal*: 46), that is, your power. So wind means power of any kind, whether the ships sail by winds or by engines, Allah *the Almighty* is fully able to still them. For this reason, we find that 'winds' in the sense of 'power' have both current power and also latent power; 'current' means that it is in action now and 'latent' means that it will come later. Likewise, every person and everything in the universe has breath, wind and a unique chemical make-up which distinguishes it from everything else; this is the role of the

police dogs which smell the scent of suspects and criminals in narcotics cases. For example, a person's perfume may remain in the place he was in even after he leaves it. This is why the Quran tells us that scent is the firmest of a person's traces: read what Allah says about Joseph (Yusuf) and Jacob (Ya'qub): '...take this my shirt and cast it on my father's face, he will (again) be able to see...' (*Yusuf*: 93). Joseph (Yusuf) was in Egypt, whilst Jacob (Ya'qub) was in the land of Palestine, yet when the caravan set off⁽¹⁾ with Joseph's (Yusuf) tunic and left behind the buildings which might have held back the winds, Jacob (Ya'qub) said: '...Most surely I perceive the greatness of Joseph (Yusuf)...' (*Yusuf*: 94); he said this despite the great distance between them. In addition, if the word *rih* "wind" is used in the singular, it indicates evil; and the meaning of 'winds' is that one wind comes from here, and another from there, so that it brings you oxygen wherever it comes from, and carries to you all kinds of fragrances, and therefore it brings you benefit. I said that those firm things attain their firmness from the presence of air which surrounds them from all sides and directions; and if you removed the air from any one side, the object would immediately fall down. Likewise, if wind comes in the singular form, it is destructive and brings havoc, as is the case when Allah *the Almighty* says: '... and in 'Ad: When We sent upon them the destructive wind' (*adh-Dhariyat*: 41) and '... by a roaring, violent blast' (*al-Haqqa*: 6); so when Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Allah is he who sends forth the winds...' (*ar-Rum*: 48), the act of sending forth of the winds is itself a blessing, a fact which is clear in the Saying of Allah: '... so they raise a Cloud...' (*ar-Rum*: 48) meaning that the winds stir the cloud and move it, which is another blessing. A cloud is water which evaporated from the earth and then collected in the atmosphere; as for rain, it is water which has been filtered by Allah's Power, just as we now perform processes of filtration in factories, for example. Rain brings us fresh, clean, cool water, which is filtered by the care of the Creator, without us having anything to do with it. If the filtration of a single cup of water requires all these processes and all this effort, what do you think about rainwater? I said before that out of His Wisdom, the Creator made three quarters of the earth's surface water, so that the surface area of the evaporated water would be broad enough to suffice the remaining quarter. To illustrate this, we

(1) This means that they left the city and went on their way (*Al-Qamus al-Qawim*, ii. 83).

gave the example of a cup of water which you leave on a table, for instance; the water will remain for a long time because only a little will evaporate. Then if you pour it onto the floor of the room, it will evaporate quickly. Allah *the Almighty* says: '...then He spreads it forth in the sky as He pleases...' (*ar-Rum*: 48). Look at the Absoluteness of the Divine Will: Allah distributes rain as He wills to the places which require rain; and it is amazing that when Allah wants to provide sustenance to a person, He might provide for him by means of clouds which never actually pass over his homeland. Look at the Nile, for example, where does its water come from? Where does the rain, which irrigates the land of the Nile from the beginning of it to the end, fall?

As for His Saying: '...and He breaks it up...' (*ar-Rum*: 48), the word *kisaf* is a plural noun meaning 'pieces'; as for His Saying: '...so that you see the rain...' (*ar-Rum*: 48), it means from within these clouds. Regarding Allah's saying: '...then when He causes it to fall upon whom He pleases of His servants, lo! They are joyful' (*ar-Rum*: 48), rain might come to them directly so that it falls right onto them, or it might come to them indirectly if the land is on an incline so that it flows down from it and waters another place, and also passes on fertility and growth to it, as the Nile used to carry silt from Abyssinia to Sudan and Egypt. This silt would continue to flow with the water all the way up the Nile to Damietta; so why did it not settle on the river-bed during all that distance? It did not settle because of the power of the water's current and its strong flow such that this silt could not sink to the bottom and settle therein. Allah *the Almighty* says: '...lo! They are joyful' (*ar-Rum*: 48) because when the winds blow over them, they bring them glad tidings of the coming of rain, and when the rain falls upon them, it gives them glad tidings of the imminent production of crops, growth, fertility, and goodness, as Allah *the Almighty* says elsewhere in the Quran: '... and you see the earth sterile land, but when We send down on it the water, it stirs and swells and brings forth of every kind a beautiful herbage' (*al-Hajj*: 5). I remember when I was young in our home on the Nile which stretched out wide in front of us, there were several islands on it in which people used to farm. I remember that we were planting maize when a flood came and drowned it when it was still green and had not ripened. The people were going to it and gathering it up in boats, and the women were cheering and all the faces were joyful, so I asked

my father *Allah rest his soul* ‘The Nile has drowned the crop, so why are the women cheering?’ My father laughed and said, ‘The women are cheering because the Nile has drowned the crop, which is the source of goodness and cause of the earth’s fertility.’ When I grew up, I read the poem of *Ahmad Shawqi*⁽¹⁾ *Allah rest his soul* about the Nile:

How long is it since you first gushed through the villages,
And what is this generosity that makes you flow through the towns?
You sent forth water which becomes pure gold⁽²⁾,
And you drown the earth – and the drowned one comes to life!

When I read this poem, I realised why the women were cheering when the Nile drowned the crops.

Joy at of the coming of rain comes according to circumstances: if it comes after desperation, famine and drought, the joy is all the greater, yet it is even deeper if the rain comes unexpectedly; Allah says: ‘... lo! They are joyful’ (*ar-Rum*: 48). As for when the rain comes in an ordinary fashion, there is less rejoicing. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ أَنْ يُنْزَلَ عَلَيْهِمْ مَنَّ قَبْلَهُ لَمُبْلِسِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾

**Though before it is sent they may have lost
all hope [49] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 49)**

The Saying of Allah, ‘...abandoned all hope’ (*ar-Rum*: 49) means that they had despaired of rain ever coming; and if rain came to them after this despair, their joy would be doubled and multiplied. The scholars⁽³⁾ have a

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- (1) Ahmad Shawqi ibn ‘Ali ibn Ahmad Shawqi is the most famous of the modern poets; he is known as ‘the Prince of Poets.’ He was born in 1868 AD in Cairo, and died in 1932 at the age of 64. He grew up in the care of the royal household, studying law and becoming acquainted with French literature. He depended upon his own personal experience in composing most of his poems. He became very wealthy and lived a life of comfort and luxury. See, *Az-Zirkili, Al-Alam*, p. 137.
- (2) The word ‘*asjad*’ means gold; it is said that it is a general word for all precious stones such as pearls and gems (*Lissan al-‘Arab*).
- (3) *Al-Qurtubi* mentions these opinions in his *Tafsir* (vii. 5301): *Akhfash* says that this repetition is meant for emphasis, and most of the grammarians are also of this view; =

point of contention concerning this verse because it repeats the words '*min qabl*' ('a short while ago') and ('[just] before'), both of which in Arabic are '*min qabl*', and which literally carry the meaning of 'before.' Upon reflection, we find that it means 'before rain was sent down to them, although before this (the sending down of rain), they had despaired.' So there are two uses of 'before'. We must understand that there is the movement of the winds which bring tidings of rain, and there is also the sending down of the rain. In fact, when the rain is sent down, there is something before this, namely, the movement of the winds. Before the movement of the winds, people felt despair, yet after the winds came, they said, 'Perhaps there will be no rain.' So how many instances of 'before' is this? There is 'before' the sending down of the rain and 'before' the movement of the winds; so the meaning is that before this – that is, before the sending down of the rain, they felt despair.

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

فَانْظُرْ إِلَىٰ آثَارِ رَحْمَةِ اللَّهِ كَيْفَ يُحْيِي الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا
إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ لَمُحْيِ الْمَوْتِ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٥٠﴾

**Look, then, at the imprints of God's mercy, how He restores
the earth to life after death: this same God is the one who
will return people to life after death – He has power over
all things [50] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 50)**

It is as though Allah *the Almighty* wanted to use what can be felt and seen in the universe to give us proof of the unseen matter. In this regard, He *the Almighty* wanted to tell us about the Resurrection and the Hereafter, which is why He explains by saying: '... Allah is the one who will return people to life after death – He has power over all things.' In connection with the earth, Allah *the Almighty* used the present tense verb 'gives life', and the present tense indicates renewal and continuation, which is a tangible process for us. As for

= Qatrab said that the first 'before' refers to the sending down, whilst the second 'before' refers to the rain, that is, 'even though before it was sent down before the rain, they were...'; it is also said that the meaning is 'before the clouds, before they had been seen'; this is the opinion which is preferred by An-Nahhas.

the raising of the dead to life, He *the Almighty* used the noun *muhyi* (the One that can bring back to life). We know full well that a noun is used to indicate the constancy of the attribute, which here is to emphasise the act of raising the dead to life. It is obvious that no one doubts the matter of death because we ourselves witness it; as for the Resurrection, it is a matter of doubt for some because it is of the unseen. Despite this, He says of death: ‘Then after that you will most surely die’ (*al-Mu’minun*: 15) emphasising this once with the word ‘behold’ (*al-Mu’minun*: 15), and then again with the Arabic participle *la*. Death is a reality which we do not doubt, so why all this emphasis? Scholars said: Indeed it is a reality which we do not doubt, but it is a reality which is ignored, and it is as though to ignore it is to deny it; if you were truly sure of it, you would not ignore it. When He mentions the Resurrection, He says: ‘Then surely on the Day of Resurrection you shall be raised’ (*al-Mu’minun*: 16). He only used one form of emphasis here, even though it is a point of doubt. It is as though once the proofs of it had been given, it should not have been doubted; this is why He *the Almighty* did not emphasise it in the same way He emphasised death. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘look, then...’ (*ar-Rum*: 50). The command to behold here is not for the sake of fantasy, spectacle, or fun, because when we say: ‘This is something to look at’, we mean that it should be investigated and studied until we arrive at the truth which lies within it. This actually happens by giving deference to the weightier proofs over the lighter ones. So, the Saying of Allah: ‘Look, then...’ (*ar-Rum*: 50) means ‘behold with reflection and deliberation’ because we want to compare what we cannot see and what we wish to be informed of concerning the Hereafter with that which we can see, namely, the restoration of life to the earth after its death. This verse therefore contains a new proof of the Power and Unity of Allah *the Almighty* tangible evidence which we can all see. Allah *the Almighty* gives all kinds of different proofs to alert the created being to His Omnipotence so that man will believe in Him as the One, All-Conquering, All-Sustaining, All-Powerful; these proofs serve as arguments which enlighten the mind, cosmic signs which prove the truth, parables which He makes for the people, promises for those who believe and warnings for those who defy. Here, we also have a cosmological proof which can be witnessed in the universe, that is, the One Who gives life to the lifeless earth, as you can witness, is the One

Who shall bring the dead back to life in the Hereafter as He tells you; a point which is emphasised by the fact that He *the Almighty* used the Arabic active participle indicating the constancy of the attribute of life-giving even before He gives life. When we say: 'So-and-so is a poet', he did not earn this attribute simply by composing poetry, but rather, he was a poet even before he composed it. Likewise, the Creator was the One Who grants life even before He ever performed this action; He was All-Powerful even before He created anything to have power over; He was the Creator even before He created any creatures, and it was by this Attribute of His that He created. In order to make clearer the similarity between giving life to the earth and giving life to the dead on the Day of Resurrection, I say: If we look at man, we find that this large body which can weigh a hundred kilos or more, has the origin of its formation in a microbe which cannot be seen with the naked eye so that they say that the spermatozoa from which the whole population of the earth grew could be fitted into a thimble, and it would only fill half of it. Then this spermatozoon takes its nourishment and sustenance, and develops and grows in size only; but the character remains the same. When the person dies, the body decays and breaks down until all that remains is the coccyx which remains and does not break down, and the earth does not consume it so that it then becomes the seed from which the person grows again by Allah's Power on the Day of Resurrection. This is why the Hadith about the raising of the dead to life on the Day of Resurrection says: '...And they will grow just like herbs grow.'⁽¹⁾ In this small bone are stored all the attributes and special characteristics of the person, and from it he will become once again as he was before he died. It is like the sesame seed, for example; despite its smallness, it contains all the special characteristics of this plant. So smallness is an indication of Allah's Omnipotence, and if you place this small seed in the right environment, it will take its nourishment from the soil and the air and

(1) *Al-Bukhari and Muslim narrated that Abu Hurayrah narrated that the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said: 'Between the two trumpet-blasts shall be forty.' He (Abu Hurayrah) said, 'Forty days?' 'Longer', he said. 'Forty months?' he said. 'Longer', he said. 'Forty years?' he said. 'Longer', he said, 'Then Allah will send down water from the sky, and they will grow just like herbs grow. There is no part of a man which does not decay, save a single bone, the coccyx bone, from which mankind will be reconstituted on the Day of Resurrection.'*

grow and develop; this growth and development do not give a new character, but the character remains the same; they only give it a larger size. This is why when they studied the anatomy of the rabbit, they found that it has a form which follows the basic anatomy of the human being, meaning that it has all the body parts and organs of the human being. Even the gnat, with its tiny size, contains all these organs; but where is its digestive system, its circulatory system, its nervous system, its sympathetic nervous system, its urinary system, and so on? The minuteness of these creatures is proofs of Allah's Omnipotence. In our modern civilisation, we find that one of the signs of scientific progress is that we make large things as small as possible. For example, look at the radio: when they first invented it, it was the size of a threshing machine; yet now it is the size of a matchbox. So greatness stems from your ability to put all these devices in this small object, or even by making them bigger than usual and bigger than what could be done before such as the 'Big Ben' clock bell. This is why we see that the Creator created things which are so small that the naked eye cannot see them, and yet which contain all the special characteristics found in large things. He also created creatures so big that you cannot confine them. So, when something develops, it does not obtain new attributes, but rather, the same attributes and characteristics which it originally contained grow in it. I said before that if a man weighing a hundred kilos, for example, contracted an illness (Allah forbid) which caused him to lose half his weight, we say: 'where did this loss go?' It went with the waste which he excreted because a person grows when the nourishment he takes is more than the waste he excretes; yet if they are equal, he remains at a certain limit and does not gain or lose weight. If Allah sends this ill person a doctor to treat him, he regains his health so that he returns to his previous weight of one hundred kilos; does the exact same thing, which he lost and caused his weight to decrease, return to him? Or does an equal amount of nourishment and constituents return to him? An equal amount to that which he lost returns to him. So the character remains as it is, without losing or gaining anything. Likewise, the character or the attributes exist in this tiny microbe or in this little seed until it is placed in the right environment whereupon it gives the same characters or attributes as its kind. They even say that the ancient Egyptians used to place seeds with the dead, and they preserved them for

thousands of years so that if one of these seeds were to be placed in the right soil, it would grow. If man can grow a seed after thousands of years, will it be difficult for Allah to make the seed of man grow again when the rain falls on it by His Command on the Day of Resurrection? Moreover, if the single seed which man grows gives him thousands of others like it, whilst the seed of man and the atom which remains of him produces only a single person, will this be difficult for the Divine Omnipotence? This is why Allah *the Almighty* urges us to reflect upon His Words: 'look, then...' (*ar-Rum*: 50) which does not mean the beholding of the eye, but rather that of reflection, discernment and reasoning. Allah reproaches those who are heedless of reflecting on His Signs in the universe, as He says: 'and how many a sign in the heavens and the earth which they pass by, yet they turn aside from it' (*Yusuf*: 105).

We call argument with the intention to bring out the truth 'debate' *munadhara* derived from the word *nadhara* (to look): each of us debates the other, not with the looking of the eye, but rather with that of the mind and reason. Allah then says: 'look, then, at the imprints of Allah's Mercy, and how He restores the earth to life after death: this same Allah is the One who will return people to life after death...' (*ar-Rum*: 50). That is, the One Who gave life to the earth '... will return people to life after death...' (*ar-Rum*: 50). As long as He *the Almighty* is confirmed as possessing the Attribute of life-giving, if He tells you that He will bring the dead to life, believe this and take what you have seen as proof of what you have not seen. Allah *the Almighty* then ends this verse with another attribute which emphasises the attribute of creation and life giving, saying: '...for He has the power to will anything!' (*ar-Rum*: 50) Besides the fact that He *the Almighty* is Alive and the One Who gives life, He *the Almighty* possesses the Attributes of Perfection and the Power to do anything, in knowledge, power, wisdom, releasing, retaining, benefitting, harming, and so on. After mentioning the act with the present tense verb which indicates continuation: '...He gives life...' (*ar-Rum*: 50) and mentioning the name which indicates the constancy of the attribute: '... The One that can bring the dead back to life...' (*ar-Rum*: 50), He then combines all the Attributes of Perfection by saying: '...for He has the power to will anything!' (*ar-Rum*: 50) Allah wants to show that man is an ingrate and that he was created impatient, so that when misfortune touches him, he is filled with self-pity; yet when

good fortune comes to him, he withholds it from others. When he despaired of the winds ever coming to him, Allah *the Almighty* sent him winds; and when he despaired of the rain ever falling, Allah sent him abundant rain. Yet did he take this bestowal to mind, so that if he despaired of anything he sought his relief from Allah, and cast his despair aside and said, 'I have a Lord to whom I can turn, and I should not give up hope as long as He exists?' The One Who relieved you from the despair of wind and the despair of rain is able to relieve you of any misfortune; so the motto of every Muslim should be, 'There is no misfortune when You are Lord.' As long as you have a Lord, do not worry, or despair, for there are no problems with Allah – there would only be a problem if you had no Lord to turn to. This is the difference between the believer and the disbeliever; the believer has a Lord to whom he can turn when his means are exhausted. As for the disbeliever, how unhappy he is, for if his means become scant, he finds no shoulder to cry on, which is why he often resorts to suicide. For this reason, when something gave Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* cause for concern, he would stand and pray, and he would say: 'Give us peace with it (the call to prayer), O Bilal!'⁽¹⁾ In the prayer, you are alone with your Lord and Creator; you present your need to Him and derive strength and aid from Him *the Almighty*. Likewise, Prophet Moses (Musa) taught us this lesson: when he escaped with the Children of Israel and Pharaoh and his people came after them, they found themselves surrounded; the sea in front of them and the enemy behind them, and they said to Moses (Musa) *peace be upon him* '...Most surely we are being overtaken' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 61). This is the human logic and realism, yet Moses (Musa) *peace be upon him* had another logic which was based on the existence of an All-Powerful Lord to whom he could turn at times of peril, so that He would give him relief for every distressful matter. So Moses (Musa) *peace be upon him* said confidently: '...By no means...' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 62). He said it out of certainty, the words of one who trusts that his Lord will not desert him. He did not base it on anything he had in store, but rather, he based it on his faith in Allah *the Almighty*: '...surely my Lord is with me: He will show me a way out' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 62). As a matter of fact, this is the sanctuary of every

(1) *Hudhayfa said, 'When the Prophet had cause for concern, he would pray.'* Narrated by Imam Ahmad in his *Musnad* (v. 388) and by Abu Dawud in his *Sunnan*, p. 1219

believer. Why not? If you are faced with a legal case, you relax when you appoint for yourself a lawyer to defend you; what, then, do you think if you have on your side the Lord of earth and sky, since He *the Almighty* is the lawyer, the judge, the witness, and the One Who issues the verdict? You see that the judge of this world might rule based on evidence which has been falsified. Also, he might rule something based on a confession which he is unable to extract from the accused, or rule based on testimonies which are in fact false. Then beyond this, he cannot ensure that his verdict is carried out because there is the judicial authority which rules, and then the executive authority which executes; and the criminal might even be able to escape from the executive authority. As for the court of Divine Justice, its Judge is Allah *the Almighty* and He requires neither evidence nor confession, nor witnesses, and no one can deceive Him or escape His Verdict; and this is why He says of Himself: ‘...and He is the best of the Judges’ (*al-A‘raf*: 87).

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلَيْنَ أَرْسَلْنَا رِيحًا فَرَأَوْهُ مُصْفَرًّا لَّظَلُّوا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ يَكْفُرُونَ ﴿٥١﴾

**Yet they will continue in their disbelief, even if We send a
[scorching] wind and they see their crops turn yellow [51]
(The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 51)**

You can observe the difference between the style of this verse: ‘But thus it is: if We send a wind...’ (*ar-Rum*: 51) and the previous verse: ‘It is Allah who sends forth the winds...’ (*ar-Rum*: 48). The saying of Allah, ‘sends forth’ uses the present tense verb which indicates continuation; we said before that the plural word ‘winds’ is only used to mean something good. It is as though the act of sending forth of the winds is something abundant, and which happens often as a grace and a generous gift from Allah. As for the word ‘wind’, and whenever wind in the singular is spoken of, we said before that it is always used to mean something evil, so He did not say ‘He sends forth’, but rather chose to say ‘if’, which indicates doubt; why? This is because the wind of evil rarely occurs, and Allah rarely unleashes it upon His servants. For example, the simoom wind comes only once a year and the life-destroying wind only ever came once in the past, as is the case with the furious storm-wind. So it is rare

and infrequent, yet if it were to afflict them, they would feel self-pity and despair, yet it is not appropriate for them to do so: do they not have prior experience which should keep them from despairing when they despaired at the absence of winds and then Allah sent them to them, and they despaired at the lack of rain and then Allah sent it down to them? So why lose hope when the Lord exists? The meaning of: ‘...and they see it...’ (*ar-Rum*: 51) is that they see the crops which had been green and lush: ‘...turn yellow...’ (*ar-Rum*: 51), that is, changed and withered: ‘...they will continue in their disbelief’ (*ar-Rum*: 51). They disbelieve because of the despair which removes Allah *the Almighty* from events, even though they had prior experience, and they had despaired before and then Allah gave them relief. This is because man has no patience for bearing trials; if they afflict him, he quickly resorts to self-pity. Had he only said, ‘I have a Lord to whom I can turn and He will lift this trial from me, and there is wisdom behind it which I will come to know’, he would relax and the matter would become easy for him. You might ask: why does the Quran say: ‘...even if We send a [scorching] wind...’ (*ar-Rum*: 51), and not just ‘but if...’? We say that the Arabic word *la* (‘thus it is’) here is what they call ‘the *la* which states the content of an oath’; so the implied statement is: ‘By Allah, thus it is: if We send’. The Arabic word *wa* here introduces the oath, and the *la* states its content. Allah *the Almighty* can swear by anything He wills about anything He wills, and every oath requires a complement: you say, ‘By Allah, I shall strike you!’ Likewise, the Arabic word *in*, which introduces a conditional clause, requires a complementary main clause. Here, Allah *the Almighty* combines an oath and a conditional in a single sentence; if this is the case, does the complement here answer the oath, or the conditional clause?

Scholars said that the Arab linguistic genius rejects the notion of two different complements in a single sentence, so the context brings a single complement which suffices us of need for the other; the complement is for whichever comes first: if the oath comes first, the complement is for the oath, and if the conditional clause comes first, the complement is for the conditional clause. Here, we have: ‘...even if We send a [scorching] wind...’ (*ar-Rum*: 51) so the oath comes first because the implied statement here is ‘By Allah, if We send a wind...’. The word: ‘...they will continue [*zhallu*]...’ (*ar-Rum*: 51) – *zhallu* is derived from the word *zhill* (shade), and *zhalla* is a perfect-tense defective

verb (*f'il naqis*) like *bata* which means 'to spend the night *baytuta*,' or *adha* which means 'to continue though the midmorning (*duha*)', or *amsa* in the afternoon (*masa*); likewise, *zhalla* means to continue through the time when there is shade *zhill*, namely throughout the day. So we take the time from the etymological root of the verb. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَإِنَّكَ لَا تَسْمِعُ الْمَوْتَىٰ وَلَا تُسْمِعُ الضُّمَمَ الدُّعَاءَ إِذَا وَلَّوْا مُدْبِرِينَ ﴿٥٢﴾

You [Prophet] cannot make the dead hear and you cannot make the deaf hear your call when they turn their backs and leave [52] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 52)

Allah *the Almighty* wanted to console His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so that he did not feel pain because of the way his people were treating him, so He said to him: 'O Muhammad, do not wear yourself out because these people will not believe, and all you have to do is pass on the message. Do not despair because of their rejection, and do not hesitate to pass on your call, and struggle for the sake of it, and declare it openly; for I sent you for a purpose, and I shall not desert you, and Allah *the Almighty* would not send a Messenger and then desert him or give him up.' And He said to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Then maybe you will kill yourself with grief, sorrowing after them, if they do not believe in this announcement' (*al-Kahf*: 6). 'If I wanted, I would have made them believers by force, and they would not have been able to disbelieve.' Allah's saying: 'If We please, We should send down upon them a sign from the heaven so that their necks should stoop to it' (*ash-Shu'ara*: 4) means 'I only want them to come to Me willingly out of love, not compulsion; for I do not want outer forms which submit, but rather, I want hearts which are devout.' Any man, by his tyranny, can make the people submit to him or prostrate to him, but no matter how much power he has been given he cannot make their hearts submit, or force them to love him. Here, Allah *the Almighty* says to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'You [Prophet] cannot make the dead hear...' (*ar-Rum*: 52). He puts them on the level of the dead, even though they are living beings who partake of sustenance. Why? Because the one who does not react to what he hears, and is unaffected by it is no different to one who is dead. Or, we can

say that a person has two lives: the life of the spirit, in which the believer and disbeliever are alike, as are the obedient and the disobedient; and the life of God's way and moral values, which is for the believer alone, and about which Allah *the Almighty* says: 'O you who believe! Answer (the call of) Allah and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life...' (*al-Anfal*: 24). He *the Almighty* addresses them with these words even though they are already alive because the meaning here is the life of Allah's way of guidance and moral values which is the life which earns you eternal bliss which is without end, lasting forever so that it does not leave you nor do you leave it. This is why He *the Almighty* said about this life: '...as for the next abode, that most surely is the life – did they but know!' (*al-'Ankabut*: 64) This is also why Allah *the Almighty* called the way which He revealed to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* a 'life-giving message' *ruh*, literally 'spirit'. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And thus did We reveal to you an inspired book by Our command...' (*ash-Shura*: 52) because Allah's way of guidance gives you an eternal life which never fades or ends. And He also called the angel which brought this message a *ruh*. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'The Faithful Spirit has descended with it' (*ash-Shu'ara*: 193). Allah's Way of Guidance is a spirit from Him brought down by the archangel Gabriel (Jibril) upon the heart of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so that a chosen Messenger would bear it and spread it amongst all the people, thereby giving them life in the Hereafter. The disbelievers in this live the life of the spirit in the outward form, in which all mankind is equal, but they are dead with respect to the second spirit, the spirit of moral values and Allah's way of guidance. For this reason, if there is a wretched person or a gangster who corrupts society more than he benefits it, we say to him, 'Your existence is equal to your absence.' Why? This is because if life is not used for the sake of eternal benefit, it is meaningless.

Here, Allah *the Almighty* says to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Do not grieve, and do not let yourself be overcome with sorrow because of these people, for they are dead, having not accepted the spirit of Allah's way of guidance and the spirit of moral values; and as long as this spirit has not entered them, there is no hope for their reform, and they will not respond to you, since response comes from those who utilise their hearing and apply

their minds to the universe around them in order to arrive at the reality of life and solve the riddle of existence.

We said before that if your plane crashes in the desert, for example, and you are cut off from the people so that you have no company and nothing around you, and then suddenly you see before you a table laid with the finest food and drink, then before you stretch out your hand to it, you must certainly ask yourself, 'Who brought this here?'

Likewise, as a human being you came into a universe which is prepared to receive you, filled with all this goodness: by Allah, does this not prompt you to ask who prepared this universe for you? Furthermore, no one ever claimed this universe for himself, and then a messenger came to you from Allah telling you about the facts of the universe, and solving for you the riddle of life and existence. But when the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* came to these people, they refused to listen to him, and they did not accept the spirit which he brought to them.

Allah *the Almighty* presents this matter to us in another verse, saying: 'And there are those of them who seek to listen to you until when they go forth from you, they say to those who have been given the knowledge: What was it that he said just now...' (*Muhammad: 16*)? This means that the spirit of the way did not reach their hearts. Allah *the Almighty* responds to them thus: '...Say: It is to those who believe a guidance and a healing; and (as for) those who do not believe, there is a heaviness in their ears and it is obscure to them; these shall be called to from a far-off place' (*Fussilat: 44*). The Quran is one, but those who receive the Quran vary: one listens with an attentive ear and a receptive heart and so benefits, and arrives at the solution to the riddle of the universe and creation because he responds to the new spirit which Allah sends to him; and another person simply turns away. Those who turned away from the Quran only feared for their positions and their authority; they were a people of corruption and tyranny, and they knew that this Divine way had come to rein in their freedoms and bring an end to their corruption and tyranny, so they rejected it. This is why you find that those who barred the way of the calls of the Messengers and opposed them were the people of authority and power. Read what Allah *the Almighty* tells us they said:

‘...surely we obeyed our leaders and our great men, so they led us astray from the path’ (*al-Ahzab*: 67).

So do not be surprised that one person hears the Quran and says in rapture, ‘Allah! Repeat it!’, whilst another turns from it without understanding what it says. There are two kinds of people who turn away from the Quran: they turn away in pride, that is, they hear the Quran and understand it, but they are too proud to obey its commandments; another person hears it, but he does not understand it because Allah has set a seal on his heart. The mission of the caller is to care for the one he calls, and not to despair if he does not respond, and to repeat the call to him in case he happens to catch him at a moment of clarity, natural disposition and a clear soul so that the call will have an effect on him and he will respond to it. If not, we have seen that many of the people of pagan ignorance embraced Islam after the call had existed for a long time such as Khalid ibn Al-Walid, ‘Amr ibn Al-‘As, ‘Ikrama, and others. And we know how long ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab hated Islam and showed enmity to those who professed it, and the story of how he struck his sister after she embraced Islam is a famous story because it was the cause of his own embrace of Islam. When he struck her and wounded her so that blood flowed from the wound, his heart inclined to his sister; and when she read the text of the Quran to him it struck his heart when it was clear, and pure natural disposition shook from him the false fanaticism of pagan ignorance, and he reacted to the verses, and their splendour pierced his heart, and he embraced Islam.⁽¹⁾ This is

(1) *Anas ibn Malik said: ‘Umar went out with his sword unsheathed and met a man, who said to him, ‘Where are you going, ‘Umar?’ He said, ‘I want to kill Muhammad.’ He said, ‘How can you be safe from Bani Hashim and Bani Zahra if you kill Muhammad?’ ‘Umar said to him, ‘I see that you too have become a monotheist, and have left your old religion!’ The man said, ‘Shall I tell you something stranger still? Your own brother-in-law and your sister have become monotheists and left your religion!’ So ‘Umar angrily walked to them, and they were with one of the Emigrants named Khabab, and when Khabab heard ‘Umar coming he hid in the house, and Umar came in and found the two of them, and said, ‘What was that jabbering I just heard coming from you? Have you become monotheists?’ His brother-in-law said to him, ‘O ‘Umar, what if the truth was in another religion to yours?’ ‘Umar became enraged at his brother-in-law and struck him a mighty blow, and his sister came to defend her husband and ‘Umar struck her with his hand, and her face became bloody. She said angrily: ‘Since the truth is in another religion than yours, I testify that there is no deity but Allah, and that Muhammad is the=*

why Allah *the Almighty* commanded His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to announce the call openly, and to do as he was commanded, that perhaps the listener might hear it at a time when his natural disposition was awakened for him, as was the case with 'Umar. When we notice the Arabic word *fā* (and) which begins this verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'You [Prophet] cannot make the dead hear...' (*ar-Rum*: 52); we find that the implication of this is, 'Be then not sad, and let not their rejection worry you because you have not been remiss in delivering the message, but rather those who received the message are remiss because they have not accepted the Divine Spirit which has come to them, but rather, they have evaded listening to it, and encouraged one another to evade it', just as the Quran says of them: 'And those who disbelieve say: Do not listen to this Quran and make noise therein, perhaps you may overcome' (*Fussilat*: 26). The fact that they enjoined one another not to listen to the Quran proves that they knew that those who hear the Quran with an attentive ear will surely believe in it and be convinced. He *the Almighty* then says: '...and you cannot make the deaf hear your call when they turn their backs and leave' (*ar-Rum*: 52). And elsewhere He said: '...and (as for) those who do not believe, there is a heaviness in their ears...' (*Fussilat*: 44), and He also said: 'deaf, dumb...' (*al-Baqara*: 18). We know from the science of physiology that dumbness comes as a result of deafness because the tongue repeats what the ear hears, so if the ear is deaf the tongue will inevitably be dumb, having nothing to repeat. This is why we find that the Arab child who grows up in an English environment will speak English because he hears it and learns it; furthermore, we find that if a person comes to an unusual word in his own language, he does not understand it – why? Because he has never heard it before; so when an Arab describes an old person as being *hayzabun* and

= Messenger of Allah!' This caused Umar to go to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* at the house of Ibn Abu Arqam, whereupon the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* went out to meet 'Umar, and took hold of his belt and his sword's sheath, and said, 'You shall not cease, O 'Umar, until Allah sends upon you the ignominy and exemplary fate that He sent upon Walid ibn Mughira! Here is 'Umar ibn Al- Khattab: O Allah, give strength to Islam (or He said 'the religion') with 'Umar ibn Al- Khattab!' 'Umar said: 'I testify that there is no deity but Allah, and that you are His servant and Messenger', and he embraced Islam. (Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in *Dalail An-Nubuwwa*, (ii. 219-220).

dardabis⁽¹⁾, and so on, you say, ‘What does this mean?’, even though it is Arabic, but your ears have never heard it. The ear is the primary means of reception for the delivery of the Message; and as long as Allah *the Almighty* has judged them as being akin to the dead, this means they have no senses: the ear does not hear the verses of the Quran, and the eye does not see the signs of the cosmos or reflect on them. This is why Allah *the Almighty* said about them: ‘...For surely it is not the eyes that are blind, but blind are the hearts which are in the breasts’ (*al-Hajj*: 46). We use the word ‘blind’ to refer to someone whose eyes are sound when he makes a mistake in something; you say to him, ‘Are you blind?’ Why? Because even though his eyesight is fine, he did not use it to serve its purpose, so it is as though he is blind. Allah *the Almighty* described these people first of all as being akin to the dead, and then that they are afflicted with deafness so they cannot hear the message; and the image is completed by their being blind so that they cannot see the signs of wonder in the universe. If only they were only deaf, since you can communicate with a deaf person by signs so he can use his eyes if he is facing you; but what will the case be if he has his back to you, as the Quran says: ‘...when they turn their backs and leave’ (*ar-Rum*: 52) meaning that they give you their backs. So they have no further way of receiving or perceiving; they are deaf and dumb, and their turning their backs has also nullified their sense of sight. So there is no hope for these people, and no way of guiding them.

Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَمَا أَنْتَ بِهَادٍ الْعُمَىٰ عَنْ ضَلَالَتِهِمْ إِنْ تُسْمِعُ
إِلَّا مَنْ يُؤْمِنُ بِآيَاتِنَا فَهُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ

**You cannot lead the blind out of their error: the only
ones you can make hear you are those who believe in
Our revelations and devote themselves [to Us] [53]
(The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 53)**

Showing someone the way and guiding them to it cannot be done with the blind, especially if the blind person deliberately persists in his blindness. We

(1) Two words meaning old and advanced in years (*Lisan Al-‘Arab*).

say about the one who is haughty in his blindness that 'he does not give blindness its right' meaning that he disdains to seek the aid of those who can see; if he were to seek the aid of the people around him, he would find that they would serve him, and he would be able to see by means of their sight. Allah's saying: '...the only ones you can make hear...' (*ar-Rum*: 53) means you cannot make hear. Allah *the Almighty* says: '....the only ones you can make hear you are those who believe in Our revelations and devote themselves [to Us]' (*ar-Rum*: 53). These are those who are pure of heart and disposition, who pay heed to Allah's universe and reflect on its secrets and the aspects of wonder and omnipotence it contains, seeing in creation evidence of the Creator, and in the universe evidence of the Maker of the universe. And why not, when we know who invented the simplest of things in our life, and we chronicle their lives and immortalise their memory; do we not know Edison, the inventor of the light bulb? It is all the more essential that we know Allah, the Creator of the sun. If a Messenger comes to you from Allah telling you of His existence, and solving for you the riddle of this existence by which you were confounded, you must believe him and have faith in what he brings you. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* teaches the Messengers to say to the people at the outset of their mission: 'And I do not ask you any reward for it...' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 109). This indicates that the work which the Messengers do for their people logically deserves to be rewarded, but they forgo their reward for their work is so valuable that no one could appraise its worth except the One Who sent them to do it, and He Alone is able to give them their reward in full.

The meaning of Allah's saying: '...those who believe in Our revelations...' (*ar-Rum*: 53) is look upon them and reflect on them, and stop to behold the wonders of creation in the universe which prove the omnipotent power of the Creator; and when a Messenger from Allah comes to those who do this, they accept him and believe in him; this is why He *the Almighty* then says: '...and devote themselves [to Us]' (*ar-Rum*: 53).

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ ضَعْفٍ ثُمَّ جَعَلَ مِنْ بَعْدِ ضَعْفٍ قُوَّةً ثُمَّ جَعَلَ
 مِنْ بَعْدِ قُوَّةٍ ضَعْفًا وَشَيْبَةً يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ وَهُوَ الْعَلِيمُ الْقَدِيرُ ﴿٥٤﴾

**It is God who creates you weak, then gives you strength,
 then weakness after strength, together with your grey hair:
 He creates what He will; He is the All Knowing,
 the All Powerful [54] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 54)**

After presenting to us some of the proofs which exist in the universe around us, Allah *the Almighty* says to us: Why do you go so far? If the signs in the universe around you are not enough, then look at the signs within your own self, as He *the Almighty* says: ‘And in your own souls (too); will you not then see?’ (*adh-Dhariyat*: 21) And He combines both types of signs when He *the Almighty* says: ‘We will soon show them Our signs in the Universe and in their own souls until it will become quite clear to them that it is the truth’ (*Fussilat*: 53). Here, He says: Reflect upon your own self. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘It is Allah who creates you weak...’ (*ar-Rum*: 54). If a morally responsible person now says, ‘I did not witness the stage in weakness in which I was created’, I say: Indeed you did not witness it in your own self, since at that time you did not have the means to witness anything; but you have witnessed it in others: you witnessed it in the simple fluid from which the embryo is formed, and in the pregnant mother, and in the woman when she bears her small, weak child, who cannot walk on its feet, or grasp with its hand, or bite with its teeth; and yet it is raised by Allah’s care until it reaches the stage of strength which you are in now. So the proof of weakness can be witnessed by all people, not in themselves but in others, and in the things they witness every day. Each one of us sees hundreds of children in different stages of development; the infant is born having no strength or power, then it begins to develop and grow so that it can sit, and then crawl, and then walk, until its systems are completely formed and it reaches the stage of adulthood and maturity.

And when Allah *the Almighty* makes the person morally responsible, we must also make him responsible, and utilise this period of youth in beneficial work. We see that if a ripe fruit is not picked, it falls down of its own accord; it is as though it wants to fulfil the purpose for which Allah *the Almighty*

created it. For this reason, our great failing and the reason why our societies are behind is that we extend the period of childhood of our young people, and we treat a young man like a child until he is twenty-five; we must meet all his desires, and the only thing we do not do is nurse him!

Our problem is that we have an indulgent sentimentality which is meaningless. In other countries outside our own, as soon as a boy reaches maturity he no longer has any right over his father, but rather, his father comes to have a right over him, and he assumes responsibility. Allah *the Almighty* teaches us, when raising children, to make them used to assuming responsibility at this age: 'and when the children among you have attained to puberty, let them seek permission as those before them sought permission...' (*an-Nur*: 59). Consider – as a human being – who has made all of the genera which are stronger than you serve you? Consider your own self and the signs which are to be found there, and the manifestations of Allah's omnipotent power which exist within your body; you came into existence in a state of weakness, unable to do anything, and relying on others to serve you. It is from His wisdom that the infant's teeth do not emerge during the period of nursing so that it does not harm its mother, and then some teeth emerge temporarily which they call 'milk-teeth' because the child is still small and cannot clean them so Allah *the Almighty* makes them temporary until he grows and becomes able to clean them, whereupon they fall out and the permanent teeth grow in their places. If you reflected on your own self, you would find signs beyond counting. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'It is Allah who creates you weak, then gives you strength...' (*ar-Rum*: 54), that is, the strength and vigour of youth. Allah *the Almighty* says: '...then weakness after strength, together with your grey hair...' (*ar-Rum*: 54), that is, the weakness of old age; and this weakness runs through all the parts of the body, and even through knowledge and memory. Allah *the Almighty* says: '...so that after having knowledge he does not know anything...' (*al-Hajj*: 5).

This weakness remains with you until you behave like an infant in everything, requiring someone to carry you and serve you. So do not ascribe this matter to the nature of your constitution, but rather to the Will of your Maker, Allah *the Almighty*; for after you were weak, He made you strong; and

He *the Almighty* is fully able to make you weak once more so that none of the medicines of this world can give you back your strength.

This is why an intellectual mocked those who take vitamin supplements in on old age, saying, ‘Woe to he whose vitamins do not come from his own back!’ For this reason, you can observe the precision of the words of Zechariah (Zakarriya) *peace be upon him* when he said: ‘He said: My Lord! Surely my bones are weakened...’ (*Maryam*: 4). This is because the bone is the final repository of a person’s nourishment, where he stores the energy which is surplus to the needs of the body; and if the body does not receive nourishment through food, it draws it from the repositories of fats, then from the muscles, and then from the bone marrow which is the last repository of nourishment in your body. The meaning of Zechariah’s (Zakaryya’s) words: ‘He said: My Lord! Surely my bones are weakened...’ (*Maryam*: 4) is, ‘I have come to the point of infirmity where there is no hope of regaining strength’, and this is confirmed by his proceeding words: ‘... and my head flares with hoariness...’ (*Maryam*: 4). I said before that the whiteness of hair is not a result of the change of the colour itself, but rather, it is the result of the absence of colour, which is why ‘white’, is not one of the colours of the spectrum. With old age, the organs of the body become weak and the glands responsible for colouring the hair become too weak to produce the black colour, so the hair comes to have no colour. You can observe that usually when people become grey-haired, they do so in what they call ‘streaks’, from here and there. Why is this? They say it is because a hair is a tiny tube, and when it is cut off during shaving, this tube opens up and some chemical components, such as soap and cologne, enter into it, thus affecting the colouring pigments and destroying them. This is why we see this phenomenon especially in wealthy people. In addition, we find that many young people become grey-haired in these particular parts of the head. Prophet Zechariah (Zakarriya) mentioned the signs of weakness according to the order of their importance, starting with: ‘He said: My Lord! Surely my bones are weakened...’ (*Maryam*: 4); then: ‘... and my head flares with hoariness...’ (*Maryam*: 4); and despite the old age of Zechariah (Zakaryya) *peace be upon him* and his weakness, and despite the fact that his wife was barren, Allah *the Almighty* answered his plea for a son to inherit the prophethood from him, giving him glad tidings of a son whom He named John (Yahya). It

is as though Allah *the Almighty* was saying to us, 'Do you think that I am not able to create despite grey hair, old age, and weakness?' This is why He says elsewhere in the Quran: '...He creates what He pleases...' (*ar-Rum*: 54). Concerning the matter of Zechariah (Zakarryya) *peace be upon him* He *Glorified is He* says: 'He said: So shall it be, your Lord says: It is easy for Me, and indeed I created you before, when you were nothing' (*Maryam*: 9). As for His Saying: '... and He is the Knowing, the Powerful' (*ar-Rum*: 54), it means that this creation is a result of His Knowledge. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: 'Does He not know, Who created? And He is the Knower of the subtleties, the Aware' (*al-Mulk*: 14). But knowledge alone is not enough since you might have knowledge but not the power to implement what you know such as an electrical engineer who has wide knowledge of this subject but does not have the ability to make a grid or a power plant, so he goes to a financier to ask for help in doing so. Because of this, Allah *the Almighty* describes Himself as having both knowledge and power. So this is the microcosmic proof of the True, Active, Free Creator Who does things with knowledge and power, and Whose actions require no effort or time; for He merely says to a thing 'Be!', and it is. Do not be surprised that your Lord merely says to a thing 'Be!' and it is because even you – a weak creature – do this with your body parts and limbs. If not, then tell me what you do when you want to stand up, for example, or pick something up: simply by wanting to move, you find that your limb obeys your will, without you even realising all the reactions and processes going on within you. If you say, 'I am an adult, and I can make all these movements as I will', then what do you think about a young infant? I explained this before with the example of the bulldozer: every movement it makes has a specific lever which the driver moves, and a button he presses, and the driver might need to use more than one control at a time to make this machine perform a single movement. As for you, simply by your wanting to move the body part, you find that it moves just as you want it to, without your knowing the muscles and nerves which participated in its movement. If you are this way, are you surprised that Allah can say to something 'Be!', and it is?

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ السَّاعَةُ يُقْسِمُ الْمُجْرِمُونَ مَا لَبِثُوا
غَيْرَ سَاعَةٍ كَذَلِكَ كَانُوا يُؤْفَكُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾

**On the Day the Hour comes, the guilty will swear
they lingered no more than an hour – they have
always been deluded [55] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 55)**

After presenting the proof which may be followed by all those who wanted to be guided, Allah *the Almighty* then gives the following warning to those who do not wish to follow the Divine Way of Guidance, saying: ‘On the Day the Hour comes, the guilty will swear they lingered no more than an hour...’ (*ar-Rum*: 55). As for the saying of Allah, ‘...the Hour comes...’ (*ar-Rum*: 50), the word *taqum* (stands) means that the Hour is already present, but it is sleeping and waiting to be summoned forth, whereupon it will dawn; it is waiting for there to be said to it ‘Be!’, whereupon it will be.

So the notion of dawning here is meant to imply something since the Last Hour is not something which dawns of its own accord, but rather, Allah *the Almighty* will cause it to dawn. So His saying: ‘the Hour comes’ (*ar-Rum*: 55) indicates that it is as fixed as an alarm clock, for example, and it has a time for which it is waiting, and when its time comes, it will dawn automatically. When you reflect on the saying of Allah: ‘...the Hour comes...’ (*ar-Rum*: 55), you find that ‘standing’ is the final stage for man when he fulfils his purpose, contrasting what comes before it: before standing comes sitting, before which comes lying, before which comes sleeping. So the meaning of the ‘standing’ of the Last Hour is that it comes to fulfil its purpose fully.

It is called the ‘Hour’ because it indicates the time at which Allah will bring about the end of the world, although for us an hour is a unit of measure of time, so we say ‘AM’ or ‘PM’, according to the government or the population and whatever time zone we are in. As for those watches which tell us the time, it does not matter if they are a few seconds or minutes fast or slow. They run automatically on batteries; they were first made in Switzerland or China. As a matter of fact, what seriously matters in this regard is the Final Hour, the Hour after which there is no hour and which has been set by Allah *the Almighty* which is why there is nothing for man but to prepare for it in one way or

another. It is strange that the disbelievers will swear, on the Day of Resurrection, that: '... the guilty shall swear (that) they did not tarry but an hour...' (*ar-Rum*: 55). If they lied in this world, will they also lie in the Hereafter? Scholars said 'no', they will actually say this according to what they think to be the case since the words they speak at this time will not be a product of free will, as the time of freedom will have passed, and no one will any longer be able to lie.

For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* says at the end of the verse: '...thus are they ever turned away' (*ar-Rum*: 55). They used to alter facts in this worldly life, whilst in the Hereafter they will not be able to do so but will rather speak according to what they think to be the case. As for 'those who had been lost in sin', the one lost in sin *mujrim* is the one who goes against what is required from him by committing a sin, so we say that he has *ajrama* (sinned), and the law calls this act *jarima* (crime).

The meaning of: '... they did not tarry...' (*ar-Rum*: 55) refers to the long time they remained in this world; it may also refer to the time they had tarried in their graves after dying until the dawning of the Last Hour; or it may refer to the time they had tarried after the first trumpet-blast which deals death until the second trumpet-blast which gives life.

So these are three periods during which they will have to wait in their graves: the longest period is for those who died at the time of Adam; then in the middle are those who came after this, such as us; then the shortest period of waiting will be for those who die between the two trumpet-blasts. In all of these times, there were disbelievers: in the time of Adam there were disbelievers, and in the times which came after him there were disbelievers, and even between the two trumpet-blasts there will be disbelievers. So the word 'tarried' here is general, referring to the longest wait including that which is long, that which is short and that which is the shortest.

These people will say on the Day of Resurrection, 'We tarried not longer than an hour' even though there can be no lying in the Hereafter, but they will say this according to what they think to be the case; for the one who is absent from a time does not sense its passing, and time is a locus for the occurrence of events just as space is the locus for their place. The one who sleeps, for

example, does not feel the passage of time because time is measured by the succession of events which occur in it; if you are not aware of the event, you will certainly not be aware of the time, whether because of sleep like the sleep of the People of the Cave, or death like the death of the one whom Allah caused to die for one hundred years and then revived.⁽¹⁾

When they awoke from sleep or death, they estimated that there had passed only the normal amount of time people sleep, saying: ‘...We have tarried for a day or a part of a day...’ (*al-Kahf*: 19). This is because in such a situation one does not perceive time, but rather, time is only perceived if it involves the succession of events. In addition, as long as a person in such a state does not perceive time, he is truthful when he tells what he thinks to be the case. This is why Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse: ‘He will say: How many years did you tarry in the earth? [112] they will say: We tarried a day or part of a day, but ask those who keep account [113]’ (*al-Mu’minun*: 112-113). That is, ask those who keep time and count it which means the angels,⁽²⁾ since they are the ones who have known events and recorded them since Adam was created until now, and they will do so until the dawning of the Last Hour. No one can be asked about a number except the one who has actually counted it, or someone who knows how to count; as for something which cannot feasibly be counted and enumerated, it is not counted: has anyone in the world, for example, ever counted all the grains of sand in the desert? This is why we hear the joke which says that a man asked another, ‘Do you know how many stars there are in the sky?’ He replied, ‘Nine billion, five hundred thousand and ninety-three stars.’ The other man said, ‘You are lying’, so he said, ‘Fine, count them yourself!’ But why will the disbelievers underestimate the time and swear on the Day of Resurrection that they tarried no longer than an hour? Elsewhere, He *the Almighty* says of them: ‘On the day that they see it, it

(1) This was Ezra (*‘Uzair*), as Ibn Jarir and Ibn Abu Hatim ascribed to Ibn ‘Abbas, Hasan, Qatada and Suddi; this is the most widely held opinion. Salman ibn Burayda said that it was Hizqil ibn Bawar. Ibn Kathir who said: ‘As for the town, the widely-held opinion is that it was Jerusalem, which he passed by after Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed it and killed its inhabitants.’ See *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, p. 214.

(2) This is the opinion of Mujahid, As-Suyuti narrated in *Ad-Durr Al-Manthur* (vi. 123), ascribing it also to Ibn Abu Shayba, ‘Abd ibn Hamid, Ibn Jarir, Ibn Al-Mundhir and Ibn Abu Hatim.

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). Scholars said it is because time differs according to the state of people in it: one person wishes that the time could be longer, whilst another wishes it could be shorter. The time which you spend with your loved ones goes quickly and you wish it could be longer, whilst the time you unwillingly spend with one you dislike stretches on slowly; it is as the poet said:

Happy times are weighed with a regular scale,
Whilst trials are weighed with heavy weights⁽¹⁾

Another said:

The loved one who bids you farewell bids farewell to patience, too,
Letting out the secret he gave to you to keep;
He gnashes his teeth in regret that he did not
Take a few more steps with you when he showed you out.
He continued until he reached the line:

If the night I spent after you left was long, it is because

I spent it complaining of the shortness of the night I spent with you.

Therefore, on happy occasions the time moves quickly, whilst on glum occasions the time moves slowly and heavily. Did you not hear what was said by that person who was united one night with the one he loved? He is reported to have said:

O night, be long! O sleep, be gone!

O dawn, hold back, and do not rise!

In the same way, the one who waits for something pleasing finds that time moves slowly, and he wishes that it could move more quickly so that he would get the pleasing thing for which he is waiting. As for the one who expects something bad or waits for it, he wishes that time could move more slowly in order to keep him distant from the bad thing which he fears. This is

(1) The word used here is *qafzan*, which is the plural of *qafiz*, a measure equivalent to 288 kilograms.

why you find that the believers wish that time could move more quickly because they are sure of the goodness that is waiting for them and the delight that they have been promised. As for those who are lost in sin, they are the opposite: they wish that time could move slowly to keep them from the torment that awaits them, which is why they will say, ‘we only stayed in the worldly life for a short time; and if only it had been longer!’ This is either because they are unaware of the passage of time and so they just say what they think to be the case, or because they want something to keep them away from the torment. So they will swear that they tarried no longer than an hour either because they think this to be the case or because the one who is unaware of events does not perceive the passage of time and cannot measure it, such as Ezra (‘Uzair), whom Allah caused to die for one hundred years and then raised him to life, thus said: ‘...then look at your food and drink – years have not passed over it...’ (*al-Baqara*: 259). And then his Lord informed him that he had stayed one hundred years: ‘...and look at your ass; and that We may make you a sign to men, and look at the bones, how We set them together, then clothed them with flesh...’ (*al-Baqara*: 259). The thing which is beyond doubt is that Allah *the Almighty* is truthful in what He tells others, and yet Ezra (‘Uzair) was also truthful in his appraisal of how much time he had spent which is why the True Lord *the Almighty* gave proof for the truth of both statements, saying: ‘...But look at thy food and thy drink – untouched is it by the passing of years...’ (*al-Baqara*: 259). Food does not go bad in the course of a day or part of a day, so the food and drink were proof of the man’s truthfulness. He *the Almighty* then says: ‘...and look at your ass! And [We did all this so] that We might make you a symbol unto men. And look at the bones [of animals and men] – how We put them together and then clothe them with flesh!’ (*al-Baqara*: 259)

So the bare bones were proof of His Truthfulness about the one hundred years. Do not say, ‘Can this verse convey the two possible explanations?’ Yes, it can, because the One Who made this event come to pass was the Lord, and He is the Withholder and the Expander: He withholds time for some people, and unleashes it for others.

This verse, which begins with the saying of Allah, ‘...And when the Last Hour dawns...’ (*ar-Rum*: 55) was revealed after Allah *the Almighty* had

removed all excuses from those who disbelieve in His Messengers meaning that He nullified the excuse they gave that He *Glorified is He* had not shown them the proofs for the most important element of faith, namely, faith in One God, and the proofs for faith in Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by means of miracles so that they would believe in the verses of legal rulings in the form of 'do' and 'do not do'.

As we said before, there are three kinds of *ayat* (signs): there are signs which affirm the essential matter of doctrine which is faith in the existence of the All-Wise, All-Powerful God (Allah *the Almighty*); there are also signs which affirm the veracity of Allah's Message delivered by His Messengers which are the miracles; and there are signs which convey rulings. Allah *the Almighty* does not do ask those who believe in Him to believe in His Rulings of 'do' and 'do not' unless they are first convinced about the Messenger who delivers His Message to them by means of a miracle; and they cannot believe in the Messenger who delivers the Divine Message to them unless the Existence of Allah *the Almighty* is confirmed for them, which is confirmed by the signs of the universe.

This is why Allah *the Almighty* is always presenting to us His signs in the universe, but He presents them one by one, and does not reveal them all at once. He brings a sign, and then He follows it with the denial and rejection which comes from the disbelievers. So He brings a sign whose result is finally decided by the disbelievers. In this way, their excuses are continually refuted until they have no excuse not to believe.

We can observe this continual repetition when Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Another of His signs is that He sends out the winds bearing good news, giving you a taste of His grace, making the ships sail at His command, enabling you to [journey in] search of His bounty so that you may be grateful' (*ar-Rum*: 46). Then He *the Almighty* mentions that these signs did not work for them: 'before you [Muhammad], We sent Messengers, each to their own people: they brought them clear proofs and then We punished the evildoers. We make it Our duty to help the believers' (*ar-Rum*: 47). And then He *the Almighty* mentions further signs: 'It is Allah who sends out the winds; they stir up the clouds; He spreads them over the skies as He pleases; He makes them break up and you see the rain falling from them. See how they rejoice when He

makes it fall upon whichever of His servants He wishes [48] though before it is sent they may have lost all hope. [49] Look, then, at the imprints of Allah's Mercy, how He restores the earth to life after death: this same Allah is the one who will return people to life after death – He has power over all things [50]' (*ar-Rum*: 48-50). Allah *the Almighty* then mentions what their response was after all these signs: 'Yet they will continue in their disbelief, even if We send a [scorching] wind and they see their crops turn yellow' (*ar-Rum*: 51). In this way, He *Glorified is He* mentions the sign and then follows it with the denial which they show, and repeats this until they have no further argument for their disbelief, and then this verse comes; Allah *the Almighty* says: 'On the Day the Hour comes, the guilty will swear they lingered no more than an hour...' (*ar-Rum*: 55) in order to say to them, 'Even if you denied all these signs, a sign which you cannot deny, will come to you, which is nothing but the Resurrection.' It is strange that they will swear by Allah in the Hereafter that they had tarried for no more than an hour, yet they disbelieved in Him *the Almighty* in this world. This verse contains a use of the rhetorical feature of complete paronomasia (*jinas tam*) in the two uses of the word 'hour'; it is the same word, but the meaning is different. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'On the Day the Hour comes...' (*ar-Rum*: 55), that is, the Resurrection. And Allah *the Almighty* says: '...the guilty will swear they lingered no more than an hour...' (*ar-Rum*: 55), that is, an hour of time. This is also clear in the following verse of poetry:

I left the city to travel to you,

And my heart is a captive of your love

This is where the word *asir* in Arabic means both 'travel' and 'captive'. My colleague Dr. Mohammad 'Abd Al-Munim, *Allah give him long life*, and I have a story about paronomasia: in a rhetoric class, the teacher said that there is no 'complete paronomasia' (*jinas tam*) in the Quran except in this verse between the words 'hour' and 'hour', but there are cases of incomplete paronomasia (*jinas naqis*) in it. Dr. Mohammad raised his hand and said, 'Teacher, I do not like to hear it said that the Quran contains something incomplete!' The Sheikh laughed at this and said to him, 'So what should I say? The scholars of rhetoric divided paronomasia into complete and

incomplete: the former means that the two words are exactly alike in the number, form and identity of their letters, whilst if they differ in any one of these things the paronomasia is incomplete, such as in Allah's words: "Woe to every slanderer, defamer" (*al-Humaza*: 1). This is where the words *humaza* (slanderer) and *lumaza* (fault-finder) have incomplete paronomasia since their first letters differ.'

I remember that the sheikh pointed to me and said, 'What do you think of what your friend is saying?' I said that we should call it 'full paronomasia' and 'partial paronomasia' based on whether the letters in the words agree fully or only partially; in this way, we would not have to say that the Quran contains 'incomplete paronomasia.' So when they say that: '...they lingered no more than an hour...' (*ar-Rum*: 55), this refers to the hour of time which we know. Time has different measurements: seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, centuries, epochs and so on and they are speaking about the hour of time which is known to us. So they will underestimate the amount of time they spent in the world or in their graves when the Resurrection surprises them. We previously told them, when they were in the ease of this worldly life, that the pleasure of this life is scant and that it is short and must end, yet they did not believe this; and now they are saying that it was only a single hour, and not even a month or a year. So how could you underestimate that which you previously overestimated, thinking that you would be there forever so that you even said: 'And they say: There is nothing but our life in this world; we live and die and nothing destroys us but time...' (*al-Jathiya*: 24). In the worldly life, you denied and lied, and you did not answer the one who called you to faith, yet now in the Hereafter you will give an answer which will be accompanied by praise for Him, as He *the Almighty* says: 'On the day when He will call you forth, then shall you obey Him, giving Him praise...' (*al-Isra*': 52). That is, you will say, 'Praise be to Allah!' As a matter of fact, a person only gives praise for something beloved to him.

He *the Almighty* then says: '...they have always...' (*ar-Rum*: 55), meaning with this untruthfulness: '... they have always been deluded' (*ar-Rum*: 55). The word *ifk* (delusion or lie) is derived from the verb *afika*, which means to turn something around so it is backwards, which is why a lie is called *ifk*

because the liar states something which contradicts reality and thereby turns it around, or he brings it into existence when it does not really exist, or he denies that it exists.

Another use of this root word is found in His *the Almighty* saying: ‘And the overthrown cities did He overthrow’ (*an-Najm*: 53). The word *mutafikat* refers to the cities which Allah overturned so that their highest became their lowest. So His saying ‘...they have always...’ (*ar-Rum*: 55) means ‘just like this delusion were they are wont to delude themselves’, that is, they lied to the Messengers concerning the truths which they brought from their Lord.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ وَالْإِيمَانَ لَقَدْ لَبِثْتُمْ فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ إِلَى يَوْمِ
الْبَعْثِ فَهَذَا يَوْمُ الْبَعْثِ وَلَكِنَّكُمْ كُنتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٥٦﴾

**But those endowed with knowledge and faith will say,
‘In accordance with God’s decree, you actually lingered till
the Day of Resurrection: this is the Day of Resurrection,
yet you did not know’ [56] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 56)**


He *the Almighty* says here: ‘...knowledge and faith...’ (*ar-Rum*: 56), so does knowledge contradict faith? No, but there is a difference between them. Knowledge is acquired, whilst as for faith, you have faith in Allah even though you have not seen Him. So you see something and therefore know it, whilst if someone else tells you of something they have seen and you have faith in his honesty, then you believe it. There is belief for knowledge as well as belief for faith, which is why it is always said that faith is for those things which are unseen for you, whilst if your faith becomes stronger and your certitude becomes stronger, the unseen thing becomes as though it were something you have seen. We clarified this issue when we spoke about what Allah *the Almighty* said to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the possessors of the elephant?’ (*al-Fil*: 1). He said ‘Have you not seen?’ even though the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was born in the Year of the Elephant, thus could not have witnessed those events; they say that this is because Allah’s informing him of

this was more believable than the vision of his own eyes. So Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘... those endowed with knowledge and faith...’ (*ar-Rum*: 56) because you acquire knowledge by deduction, proof, and so on; or you take it from someone who informs you of it and you believe what he tells you. This is why when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to one of his Companions, ‘How did you awake this morn?’ he replied, ‘I awoke as a true believer,’ whereupon he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Every truth has its nature, so what is the nature of your faith?’ This means, what is the proof of the words you have spoken? The Companion said, ‘I have withdrawn myself from this worldly life so that its gold and its clay are alike to me; and it is as though I behold the denizens of paradise receiving bliss in paradise and the denizens of hell receiving torment in hell’ – he meant to tell the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘I awoke in such a state that it was as though I beheld all that you have told us about.’ Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, ‘You have come to know, so be constant!’⁽¹⁾ But who are the ones who were endowed with knowledge? They are the angels who live to witness all things; or it means the Prophets because the One Who sent them told them of it; or it means the believers because they believed in the Message of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in all that he told them. He *the Almighty* says: ‘...those endowed with knowledge...’ (*ar-Rum*: 56), not that ‘they knew’, as though ‘knowledge’ is not acquired but rather comes from One Who knows more than you and gives it to you. If you say, ‘Do the scholars not play a role in adducing evidence and examining it?’ I say ‘yes’, but who showed this evidence to them? So knowledge is a gift from Allah. He *the Almighty* then says: ‘... In accordance with Allah’s Decree, you actually lingered till the Day of Resurrection...’ (*ar-Rum*: 56). This means that it was something fixed and set in the Preserved Tablet until the Day of Resurrection. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘...this is the Day of Resurrection...’ (*ar-Rum*: 56) which you had denied, whilst now you must surely believe, since something has come to you which you cannot deny because it has become a reality; it is in your interest that your excuse be

(1) Narrated by Al-Haythami in *Majma' Az-Zawai'd*, p. 57; he ascribes it to At-Tabarani in *Al-Kabir* on the authority of Harith ibn Malik Al-Ansari.

accepted, yet it shall not be accepted from you, and We shall not hear your words because We already refuted all your excuses before. Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘... yet you did not know’ (*ar-Rum*: 56). At the start of the verse, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘... those endowed with knowledge...’ (*ar-Rum*: 56), ascribing knowledge to Allah; yet here He *the Almighty* ascribes it to them, because Allah presented the proofs to them but they did not take anything from them, and He *the Almighty* presented to them all the arguments, evidence and signs, yet they were heedless of them. So they did not take, from the proofs and arguments that which would have led them to knowledge.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:


 فَيَوْمَئِذٍ لَا يَنْفَعُ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مَعْذِرَتُهُمْ وَلَا هُمْ يُسْتَعْتَبُونَ

**On that Day the evildoers’ excuses will be of no
use to them: they will not be allowed to make
amends [57] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 57)**

He *the Almighty* says: ‘on that Day...’ (*ar-Rum*: 57), that is, on the Day of the dawning of the Last Hour, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘... the evildoers’ excuses will be of no use to them: they will not be allowed to make amends’ (*ar-Rum*: 57); this means that no excuse will be accepted from them. The meaning of the saying of Allah: ‘...evildoers’...’ (*ar-Rum*: 57) is that they did evil against themselves; and the evildoer resorts to evil because he wants to take from others that which he was unable to get for himself. *Zhulm* (evil) means to take the fruit of the effort of another and usurp it for yourself like blood transfusion; but if your blood is not from your own vein, it is rotten blood and is not suitable for you, and no positive works in life will ever come from it, but rather, its result will assuredly be works of evil because it is unlawful blood, so how can it act in the cause of the lawful? This is why it is narrated in a Hadith that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘O people! Allah is good, and accepts only that which is good; and Allah commanded the believers with the same as that with which He commanded the Messengers, saying: “O Messenger! Eat of the good things and do the good; surely I know what you do” (*al-Mu’minun*: 51), and He *the Almighty* says: “O you who believe! Eat of the good things that We have provided you

with, and give thanks to Allah if Him it is that you serve" (*al-Baqara*: 172). He then mentioned the man who travels far and is covered with dust, and then raises his hands to the sky and says, "O Lord! O Lord!" – yet his food is unlawfully gained, and his drink is unlawfully gained – so how will his prayer be answered?'⁽¹⁾ So how can our prayers be answered when every part of us is unfit to call upon Allah with personal supplication?

It is not only a matter of their excuse not being accepted, '... but also they will not be allowed to make amends' (*ar-Rum*: 57). To 'make *i'tab* (amends) refers to a dialogue of kindness and conciliation which takes place between two people about something which has angered one of them, this dialogue might not take place unless one of them approaches the other in order to settle the matter. For example if your friend passes you by without greeting you, you become angry with him; if you are earnest in your affection for him, you will go to him and say, 'By Allah, I have an issue with you because you passed me by and did not greet me the other day', so he says to you, 'By Allah, I was busy with such-and-such and I did not see you', and this excuse removes the ill feeling you harboured towards your friend. We say that so-and-so *a'taba* (reproached) his friend, who then made *a'taba* (amends) with him, that is, he removed his reproach, which is why they say, 'Love remains as long as there is reproach', as the poet said,

As for reproach, it is more chivalrous for those who love each other,

For love is mended with reproach, and made sincere.

And the additional glottal stop added to the verb *a'taba* 'reproach' to make amends is called 'the glottal stop of removal', as the poet said:

In my mind I want to forget you, but my heart refuses,

And I make amends with you and take my fill of reproach!

An example of this is found in the words Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he addressed his Lord on the day of At-Tai'f after its people treated him so badly until he sought refuge in an orchard and began to

(1) Narrated by Ahmad in his *Musnad*, p. 328, Muslim in his *Sahih*, p. 1015, and Ad-Darimi in his *Sunnan*, p. 200, on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.

entreat his Lord, saying, ‘Lord, to whom will You entrust me? To some far off stranger who will ill-treat ⁽¹⁾ me? Or to a foe whom you have empowered against me? So long as You be not wroth with me, I care not; but Your favouring help is for me the broader way...’ until He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Yet it is for You to reproach until You are well pleased.’ ⁽²⁾ This means, ‘O Lord, if You are angry because of something I did, I wish to make amends with You and end Your reproach.’

Another use of the so-called *hamzat al-izala* (the glottal stop of removal) occurs in our verb '*ajama* which means to make a word clear and to remove its '*ajm* (obscurity) and clarify its meaning; this is why we call a dictionary a *mu'jam*, because it removes the obscurity of words and explains them.

Also in His saying: ‘Surely, the Hour is coming – I am about to make it manifest...’ (*Ta Ha*: 15), the verb *ukhfiha* (to keep it hidden) could also mean ‘I am close to removing its obscurity with signs and signals.’ As for the word *yusta'tabun* in Allah's saying: ‘...excuses will be of no use to them...’ (*ar-Rum*: 57), it occurs three times ⁽³⁾ in the Quran, and one other time in the active voice ⁽⁴⁾ because they ask for their reproach to be settled. As for ‘...they will not be allowed to make amends’ (*ar-Rum*: 57), it is because they did not ask to make amends themselves, but rather, they made for

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- (1) This word in Arabic is *jahma*, which means to greet someone with an unpleasant face, that is, ‘who will meet me with harshness and a scowling face’. If someone is said to have a face which is *jahm*, this means he has a gloomy face. Ibn Mandhur, *Lisan Al-'Arab*
 - (2) This supplication was narrated by Ibn Hisham in *As-Sira An-Nabawiyya*, p. 430; the situation was that the people of *At-Tai'f* goaded their simpletons and slaves to abuse him *peace and blessings be upon him* insulting him and shouting at him until the people were all gathered together against him and he was forced to take refuge in an orchard belonging to ‘*Utba and Shayba, the sons of Rabi'a*; and once Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* felt himself to be safe and at peace, he made this supplication.
 - (3) The word ‘to be allowed to make amends’ in the passive voice occurs three times in the Quran: ‘...then shall no permission be given to those who disbelieve, nor shall they be made to solicit favour’ (*an-Nahl*: 84). Allah's saying: ‘On that Day the evildoers' excuses will be of no use to them: they will not be allowed to make amends’ (*ar-Rum*: 57), and Allah's saying: ‘... So on that day they shall not be brought forth from it, nor shall they be granted goodwill’ (*al-Jathiya*: 35).
 - (4) This occurs in Allah's saying: ‘...and if they pray to be allowed to make amends, they will not be allowed to do so’ (*Fussilat*: 24).

themselves intercessors to ask for them; but their expectations were dashed both in the one regard and the other. So, the meaning of Allah's saying: '...they will not be allowed to make amends' (*ar-Rum*: 57) is that no 'intercessor' will dare to say to them, 'seek to make amends with your Lord, and ask Him to make amends with you', that is, to settle His Reproach with you. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلَقَدْ ضَرَبْنَا لِلنَّاسِ فِي هَٰذَا الْقُرْآنِ مِن كُلِّ مَثَلٍ وَلَئِن جِئْتَهُمْ بِآيَةٍ لَّيَقُولَنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِنَّا أَنْتُمْ إِلَّا مُبْطِلُونَ

In this Quran We have set every kind of illustration before people, yet if you [Prophet] brought them a miracle, the disbelievers would still say, 'You [prophets] deal only in falsehood' [58] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 58)

This verse means that We have not left any excuse for any of those who disbelieve in their Messengers, because We gave them numerous parables and all manner of proofs which they could see and use as evidence of that which they could not see, taking what they see and feel as proof of what is unseen to them. When Allah *the Almighty* wants to convince them to believe in One God who is without partner, He gives them this parable from the experience of their own lives: 'Allah sets forth an example: There is a slave in whom are (several) partners differing with one another, and there is another slave wholly owned by one man. Are the two alike in condition...' (*az-Zumar*: 29). Is a slave with one master equal to a slave with several masters who vie with each other for his services, so that if he pleases one he angers the others? He then makes the matter even clearer with a parable drawn from men's own souls – and there is nothing closer to a man than his own soul – so Allah *the Almighty* says: 'He sets forth to you a parable relating to yourselves: Have you among those whom your right hands possess partners in what We have given you for sustenance, so that with respect to it you are alike; you fear them as you fear each other? Thus do We make the communications distinct for a people who understand' (*ar-Rum*: 28). This means: if you would not accept for your bondsmen to share with you that which Allah *the Almighty* provided for you so that you would be equal with respect to this provision, how could you accept

that Allah *the Almighty* could have any partners? When He *Glorified is He* wants to show the falsehood of their idolatry and their polytheism, He gives them this parable: ‘...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 invoker and the invoked’ (*al-Hajj*: 73). A *mathal* (parable) means to compare one thing to another, and attach something obscure to something clear in order to clarify it and make it settle in the mind of the one who hears it such as if you compare someone unknown with someone known, as this is called in Arabic *mithl* or *mathal*, so you say, ‘So-and-so is like (*mithl*) so-and-so.’ As for a *mathal* (proverb), it is the words of a wise person which have become well known to the people so that people relate it whenever the occasion for it comes. We gave the example before for this of the king who sent a woman to pass his offer of marriage to the mother of Iyyas bint ‘Awf ibn Mahlam As-Shaybani, and this woman’s name was ‘Isam; and when she came back from her mission, he met her by saying, ‘What is behind you, ‘Isam?’ This has now become a proverb which people say on these kinds of occasions, although originally it was said about a specific incident. Proverbs are always said as they are, without anything being changed; we say, ‘What is behind, you ‘Isam?’ to both men and women, and to individuals, pairs, or groups of people. In the same way, we symbolise generosity with the name of Hatim, and bravery with ‘Antara, and so on. This is because Hatim At-Tai’ was the model of generosity, while ‘Antara was that of bravery. Another proverb is that we say to one who is confronted by one who is stronger than him, ‘If you are a wind, you have just run into a hurricane!’ and we say to the one who has not properly prepared for something, ‘Before firing the arrows, fill the quiver!’

So a proverb is a statement of comparison which is given now but taken from an earlier saying because that saying was powerful and succinct, so it was memorised and passed on from one mouth to another. The Quran uses the rhetorical styles of the Arabs, and their ways of expression and clarifying meanings using parables so that it even bases a parable on a gnat to the extent that some people found it far-fetched that the Quran, with its majesty and greatness, would base a parable on a gnat not knowing that Allah *the Almighty* ‘... is not ashamed to set forth any parable – (that of) a gnat or anything

above that...' (*al-Baqara*: 26). The saying of Allah: '... or anything above that...' (*al-Baqara*: 26) does not mean above it in size, as some people think, saying, 'why would He *the Almighty* say "or something above it" when this is obvious?'; rather, the meaning is that which is beyond it in smallness, and partakes even more in the diminutiveness which you people disdain, such as microscopic creatures and viruses and so on.

But why does Allah *the Almighty* *yadrib* (strikes) parables unto men? Scholars said it is because man has many senses: he sees, hears, smells, tastes, touches, and so on; and were you to reflect on all these senses, you would find that the thing which has the biggest impact on the senses is to strike. This is why if you want to wake someone from sleep, he might not hear your calls, so you go to him and shake him as though you are striking him, and he wakes up.

So striking is the mark which never falls short of its intended target; this is what it means when Allah *the Almighty* says: '...and others who travel in the land seeking of the bounty of Allah...' (*al-Muzzammil*: 20), that is, who will leave a clear mark on it, such as ploughing, for example, which resembles nothing so much as striking the earth. Striking cannot fulfil its purpose and leave an effect unless it causes pain in the one struck without hurting the striker; otherwise, you might strike something hard and hurt your own hand, in which case it is as though you are striking yourself. A poet recognised this when he said to those who do not believe in Allah's predestination

O you who scoff at the vicissitudes of fate,

It is not fate you hurt, but rather yourself;

O you who strike a rock with a staff:

Do you strike the staff, or strike the stone?

Allah *the Almighty* propounds parables to make you feel them, and feel them like the pain of being struck. If a person does not feel the impact of a parable, he is like the one who does not feel it when he is actually physically struck; and this is the one who is insensible or paralysed – Allah forbid! So the meaning of Allah's saying: 'In this Quran We have set every kind of illustration before people...' (*ar-Rum*: 58) is: We have brought parables and proofs which no one can receive except as he receives a block struck to him because being struck is the final stage of the stages of sensation. I said before

that, Allah *the Almighty* gave a parable of His Own Self when He said: ‘Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth; a likeness of His light is as a niche...’ (*an-Nur*: 35). The parable here is not that of His Light as some people think, but rather it is a parable of how He *the Almighty* lights up the expansive universe, and how He *the Almighty* gives you light physically with the sun, moon and stars, and gives you light spiritually with His way of guidance and His moral values. The benefit of physical light is that it removes darkness so that you can move in guidance and sight and prevent your steps and movement from destroying that which is smaller than you, or your being destroyed by that which is more powerful than you; the upshot is that you do not harm that which is weaker than you, and you are not harmed by that which is stronger than you. Likewise, the spiritual light of Allah’s way of guidance and moral values prevent you from harming others, and prevent others from harming you; and just as the physical light saves you from physical damage, the light of morality saves you from spiritual damage. This is why He *the Almighty* says, after giving us this parable: ‘...light upon light. Allah guides to His Light whom He pleases, and Allah sets forth parables for men, and Allah is Cognizant of all things’ (*an-Nur*: 35). Before, we mentioned the praise poetry which Abu Tamam⁽¹⁾ dedicated to the caliph:

Brave as Amr, generous as Hatim,

Lenient as Ahnaf, shrewd as ‘Iyas.

Upon this, one of those who envied his closeness to the caliph said, ‘Do you compare the caliph to such boorish Arabs?’ He lowered his head for a moment, and then completed those lines with others which were in the same Arabic metre and rhyme,

Blame me not for comparing him to his inferiors
Even though he is matchless in worth and power,
For Allah has drawn a parable for His Light
With some of His creatures: a niche and a lantern!

(1) His full name was Habib ibn Aws At-Tai’; he was born in a village in Syria in 180 AH. He had a humble upbringing, working as a weaver’s assistant. He died in 231 AH at 51 years of age.

What is amazing about this is that they found the papers which he owned, and these two lines of poetry could not be found anywhere on them, which means that he came up with them on the spot. I said, 'By Allah, even if they had found that he had prepared these lines beforehand, it would not detract anything from him, but rather, it would have showed his intelligence, and his preparedness, and his expectation that the jealous and envious people might say such a thing to him.' But these parables did not affect them, and they did not benefit from them; and if only things had gone no further than that, but Allah *the Almighty* says: '...yet if you [Prophet] brought them a miracle...' (*ar-Rum*: 58), that is, a new one, '...the disbelievers would still say, 'You [prophets] deal only in falsehood' (*ar-Rum*: 58). So they accuse the Messengers, concerning that which they convey from their Lord, of being people of falsehood and deceit.

Allah *the Almighty* justifies to the people that He did not agree to send them the signs for which they asked by virtue of the fact that the nations who denied their Messengers before this would ask for signs, and Allah *the Almighty* would give them that for which they asked, and this would only make them deny all the more. This is why He *the Almighty* says: 'And nothing could have hindered Us that We should send signs except that the ancients rejected them...' (*al-Isra'*: 59). So the truth is that they want nothing more than to draw out the proceedings and stretch out the length of this useless argument; moreover, to give them what they asked for despite their denial of the previous signs would be to show respect for their lack of faith, and to imply that the previous signs were insufficient since He *the Almighty* then gave them further signs. So the lack of any further signs means that the previous signs were sufficient for faith; yet they did not have faith, so Allah *the Almighty* will not fulfil their request for any further signs. This matter is clear in the debate between Abraham (Ibrahim) *peace be upon him* and Nimrod, as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Have you not considered him (Namrud) who disputed with Abraham (Ibrahim) about his Lord because Allah had given him the kingdom? When Abraham (Ibrahim) said: My Lord is He who gives life and causes to die, he said: I give life and cause death...' (*al-Baqara*: 258). At this point, Abraham (Ibrahim) *peace be upon him* felt that his adversary was inclined towards argumentation and sophistry, and simply wanted to drag out the argument and

waste time with back-and-forth disputation. So he set aside this argument – even though his adversary did not really deal death or grant life – and moved him on to another argument from which he could not extricate himself, and which he had no way of evading, so he said: ‘... "Allah brings the sun from the east, so bring it from the west"...'’ (*al-Baqara*: 258). So, what answer could this adversary give? ‘... The disbeliever was dumbfounded. Allah does not guide those who do evil.’ (*al-Baqara*: 258)

Likewise, Pharaoh resorted to this same kind of argumentation in his debate with Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them*. At every stage he would say, ‘... Musa (Moses), who is this Lord of yours?’ (*Ta Ha*: 49) This is a vacuous argument which is only resorted to by those who are intellectually bankrupt and have no other arguments to utilise

We can observe that the verse uses the singular form when it says, ‘... and if you should bring them communication ...’ (*ar-Rum*: 58), and then switches to the plural form when it says: ‘... the disbelievers will surely say, "You are but false claimants.”’ (*ar-Rum*: 58) They did not say to their messenger *peace be upon him* for example: ‘You are making false claims’ addressing him using the singular pronoun. Why did they not they do so? They say as such because if people of a messenger denied him by saying, ‘You are making false claims’, perhaps some of his believing followers might defend him and testify to his truthfulness; so the plurality is addressed in order to be more comprehensive, as though they were saying, ‘You are making false claims as are all those who stand up for you.’ The meaning may also be ‘You’, all the messengers, ‘... are but false claimants.’ (*ar-Rum*: 58) In other words, you yourselves are liars who are inventing these things and saying it is from Allah. It is strange that these people believe in Allah and then deny His messengers, such as the disbelievers of Mecca who mocked the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when the Revelation did not come to him for a long spell, saying, ‘Muhammad’s Lord has forsaken him!’⁽¹⁾

(1) Jandab ibn ‘Abdullah Al-Yajli said that the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was ill and did not rise for a night or two, and a woman came to him and said, ‘O, Muhammad, I see that your devil has left you!’ So Allah Glorified is He sent down: ‘Consider the bright morning hours, and the night when it grows still and dark. =

They did not know that the Revelation exerted the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and it was very difficult for him at first so that he went to his wife Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* and said, 'Cover me, Cover me! Wrap me up, wrap me up!' And his forehead dripped with sweat. Furthermore, he would say of the angel, 'And he whelmed me in his embrace until he reached the limits of my endurance.'⁽¹⁾ This was only due to the meeting of angelic nature with human nature; this is why Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* would assume, for our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the form of a man who had no traces of having travelled upon him and whom no one knew. Once, he came to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he was gathered with the Companions, asking him about Islam, faith and excellence.⁽²⁾

= *Your Sustainer has not forsaken you, nor does He scorn you.* (ad-Duha: 1-3). Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim; in another narration, Jandab said: 'Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* was long in coming to the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so the idolaters said, 'Muhammad's Lord has forsaken him!' Narrated by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir iv. 532.

- (1) 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* said, 'I saw him *peace and blessings be upon him* when the Revelation was coming down to him on a very cold day, and when it had finished coming to him, his forehead was dripping with sweat.' Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih 2, Kitab Bad' Al-Wahy. Ibn Hajar said in Fath al-Bari i. 21: 'The phrase tafassama jabinuhu 'his forehead dripped with sweat' is a metaphor taken from the word fasm which means to open a vein so that blood pours from it, an exaggerated way to depict the copious flow of sweat.'
- (2) [Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'One day, we were with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when a man came to us wearing clothes of brilliant white, with jet black hair, upon whom were no traces of his having travelled, and none of us knew him. He came and sat right before the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* placed his knees against his, placed his hand on his thigh and said, "O, Muhammad, tell me about Islam." And he *peace and blessings be upon him* answered him. "And tell me about faith." he said. He *peace and blessings be upon him* answered him. "And tell me of excellence," he said, and he answered him. "And tell me of the Hour," he said, and he answered him...' Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'Then, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, "Do you know who the questioner was?" "Allah and His Messenger Muhammad, know better," I answered. He replied, "It was Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*. He came to you to teach you your religion."' Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih 8, Kitab Al-Iman, and by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih 50, but on the authority of Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him*.

The fact that the Revelation intermitted a while for Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was intended by Allah *Glorified is He* to give respite to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from the difficulty of the Revelation until this pain and exhaustion had left him, whereupon he would once again yearn for the Revelation, and it would be easy for him to bear it. Likewise, he would become used to receiving it from an angel, for when a person yearns for something, he becomes willing and able to bear hardships for its sake, and what was difficult becomes easy for him. It becomes like the one who walks towards his beloved and does not care if he walks on thorns or is faced by perils and dangers.

Revelation is a meeting between the human and the angelic; so either the messenger is transferred to the level of the angel, or else the angel is transferred to the level of the human. This kind of proximity did not occur at the beginning of the descent of the Revelation; rather, it wore out Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so that he needed this period of rest when the Revelation intermitted for a while. This is why Allah says: ‘and remove the burden that weighed so heavily on your back.’ (*ash-Sharh*: 2-3). What this means is that We have made this burden light so that it does not exhaust you.

Allah says, in reply to them (those who said, ‘Muhammad’s Lord has forsaken him!’): ‘By the morning brightness and by the night when it grows still, your Lord has not forsaken you [O, Prophet], nor is He displeased with you.’ (*ad-Duha*: 1-3) It is strange that they said, ‘Muhammad’s Lord has forsaken him’, acknowledging The Lord of Muhammad at the moment of difficulty and disquiet which had come to him which caused them to mock him to the extent that they said, ‘Muhammad’s Lord has abandoned him.’ Yet, his Lord resumed once again sending him Revelation, and he called them to faith; however, they disbelieved and denied.

كَذَلِكَ يَطْبَعُ اللَّهُ عَلَى قُلُوبِ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

**In this way God seals the hearts of those who
do not know [59] (The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 59)**

Allah *Glorified is He* says, *kadhalika* translated as ‘in this way’ (*ar-Rum*: 59) which means that in their denial of all the signs which came to them, ‘...Allah

seals the hearts of those who do not know.' (*ar-Rum*: 59) He seals their hearts closed and fastens them shut.

If you say that it is better for their hearts to remain open so that they might receive some guidance and light, we say that the sealing of the hearts of these people only takes place after all the means of calling them have been exhausted without their responding so that there is no hope for guiding them, and there is no purpose in trying to make them pay heed.

The True Lord *the Most High* is a Lord Who helps His servant to do what he loves and grants him that which he desires, even if it is disbelief. These people wanted disbelief and loved it, so Allah *the Almighty* helped them with that which they wanted and sealed their hearts so that faith would not enter them and disbelief would not leave them.

Therefore, we have formerly warned that who undergo misfortunes and lose loved ones not to mourn perpetually and become accustomed to mourning, lest Allah *Glorified is He* aids them in their desire to love and adore grief so that woes and misfortunes continually afflict them. Beware of leaving the door of grief ajar; rather, close it with the nails of contentment, for if grief stays with you, it will not leave you a single loved one.

We also say that if someone is too busy to keep close to you, do not remind them of your presence but help them in staying away from you by not thinking about them.

If you say: 'If the True Lord has described them as not knowing, then why does He seal their hearts and why does He call them to account?' We say that it is due to the lack of knowledge being a result of their negligence. Allah *the Exalted* gave them evidence and cosmological signs which proved His Existence, yet they did not pay heed to these signs. Moreover, they did not adduce from this evidence the existence of the All-Powerful Creator and the necessity of Allah's Message. Thus, their lack of knowledge is the result of their heedlessness and negligence.

However, what followed was their rejection of messengers and denial of the signs, but will the course of the call come to an end just because they refused to listen to it? Allah *Glorified is He* created the universe and dispersed

throughout it signs which prove the existence of the One Single Deity and placed within it miracles which conform the truthfulness of messengers in what they convey from Allah *the Almighty*. The True Lord does not benefit from these signs since His dominion is not increased by our worship nor decreased by our disobedience. The whole matter from top to bottom is for our benefit, and so the upshot of this matter is the following: ‘Put those deniers out of your mind, O, Muhammad, and hold fast to what you are doing.’

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

فَاصْبِرْ إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ وَلَا يَسْتَخِفَّنكَ الَّذِينَ لَا يُوقِنُونَ ﴿٦٠﴾

**So be patient, for God's promise is true: do not
let those with no firm beliefs discourage you [60]
(The Quran, *ar-Rum*: 60)**

Be patient (O, Muhammad) in the face of their hatred and in the face of their obstinacy and stubbornness. Be patient in the face of their persecution of you and of those who believe in you. Be patient in the face of all of this since the final end will be on your side: ‘... for Allah's promise is true ...’ (*ar-Rum*: 60). Allah *Glorified is He* promised His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* succour and victory, and His promise is true. Thus, be certain that succour is coming.

Yet, as long as succour is coming, why is there this struggle between the believers and the disbelievers, and why is there all this hardship and toil in the cause of the call? Some said that it is because Allah *the Almighty* wanted to test the followers of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and train them in the matter of the responsibility of bearing the trust of the call and the carrying the torch of light after Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and taking it not only to the people of the Arabian Peninsula, but to the entire world.

There must be people who adhere firmly to principles and are not shaken by hardships. The proof of this is that they are injured and persecuted, yet they bear this patiently; this is the most important quality of those who are being groomed to assume such trust.

If you see any way or principle which is indulgent with its followers at first, know that it is false because the true principle demands that its followers

sacrifice their lives and their wealth, giving to it before they take from it. Why is this? It is due to the preacher of false principles not being able to find anyone to join him in his falsehood unless he first seduces them with money and buys their conscience. Otherwise, how will he attract them to this false principle and make them follow him? They must take the reward first.

As for the true principle, the one who follows it knows that its reward is delayed until the Hereafter, and he aspires to things beyond this world in which he believes and for which he works. Thus, he freely gives his own life and his wealth in the cause of this principle.

In the course of the call, we saw that many people apostate when a significant event befell Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or a calamity alarmed the people. It is as though hardship is a sieve which separates these people from those so that no one remained under the banner of 'There is no deity but Allah', except those who were valiant, strong and able to carry this banner to the whole world.

Allah *the Exalted* says to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Be patient in the face of their rejection, their denial and their plotting against you, for We shall aid you, and We shall not desert you. This aid was clearly shown to you when they opposed you publicly, and you defeated their public opposition. Moreover, they plotted against you secretly, and you defeated their plotting. They even sought help from jinns to ruin things for you, yet, Allah *Glorified is He*, exposed their plans, and saved you from them. So, be at peace, for We are waiting for them, and We shall never give you up. Rather, We shall show you the punishment they deserve in this world, and you shall see it with your own eyes or else in the Hereafter, after your death.' The True Lord *the Most High* says: '... whether We show you part of what We have promised them in this life or whether We take your soul back to Us first, it is to Us that they will be returned.' (*Ghafir: 77*).

Part of this punishment which was sent upon them in this world and which our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* witnessed was what happened to them on the day of Badr when they were slain, captured and put to flight. We said before about 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him*—and what a man he was—that even the Quran would come down and affirm his

opinions, yet when the Words, ‘Their forces will be routed, and they will turn tail and flee.’ (*al-Qamar*: 45), were revealed, he was amazed and said, ‘What forces are these which will be routed, when we are unable even to defend ourselves?’ Then, when the battle of Badr took place, and he saw what he saw there, he said, ‘Allah spoke the truth! "Their forces will be routed and they will turn tail and flee’ (*al-Qamar*: 45).

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘... for Allah's promise is true ...’ (*ar-Rum*: 60). A promise is glad tidings of something good whose time has not yet come. The difference between a promise of good from a human being and a promise of good from Allah *Glorified is He* is that you might fail to live up to your promise because you are subject to vicissitudes, and you do not possess all the necessary means to ensure that you keep the promise. Moreover, when the time to keep it comes, you might not be able to do so; you might change your mind about it and covetously withhold it or see that the other does not deserve it, etc.

The vicissitudes which might change you, change him, or change the value of the good thing which you promised to give are all in play and might prevent you from keeping the promise you made. For this reason, the True Lord *the Most High* teaches us to take precautions for this fact by saying: ‘Do not say of anything, "I will do that tomorrow" without adding, "Allah willing"' (*al-Kahf*: 23-24). This means to link your actions to Allah’s Will, which facilitates the realisation of the action for you. You should not assert that you will do something when you do not intrinsically possess any of the means to do it.

We said before to suppose that you say, ‘I will meet you tomorrow in such-and-such place and give you such-and-such.’, you say this and make this promise without being able to guarantee that you will live to see tomorrow, nor that your friend will live to see tomorrow; if you do both live to see tomorrow, your opinions might change, or something might happen to you which would prevent you from keeping the promise. So, your words: ‘if Allah so wills’ protect you from being called a liar if you do not keep the promise because you had promised. But Allah did not will it, so you had nothing to do with it. Then, from whom do true promises come? They come from the One Who possesses all the means of fulfilment and cannot be stopped by any impediment.

Allah *Glorified is He* then, says: '... Do not let those with no firm beliefs discourage you.' (*ar-Rum*: 60) The verb *khaffa* means not to have weight any more. The verb *istakhaffa* literally means to seek to make something light. For example, when you are harsh with someone, another person comes and says, 'Ease up on him!' The verb *istakhaffa* also means the same as *istafazza* (to agitate), namely to move someone and disturb him from his immobile state so that if he were sitting, for example, he would stand up. This is why, on occasions like this, we use expressions like, 'Stay firm! So-and-so is trying to disquiet you' which means that he wants to make you lose your forbearance and composure; in other words, he says, 'Stop being so shaky (*khafif*, literally lighten)', and so on. We say to a boy, '*fizz!*' which means 'stand up'; an example of this is Allah's Words: 'And incite [to senselessness] whomever you can amongst them with your voice and assault them with your horses and foot soldiers ...' (*al-Isra'*: 64). He says *istafziz* (incite). Thus, the meaning of *istakhaffa* is to attempt to make someone uncertain and to cause him to be shaken from his current state of composure.

The meaning, therefore, is the following: 'Beware, O, Muhammad, lest the people agitate you or remove you from your state of composure so that you clash with them. Rather, remain firm and composed in your call, and do not worry because Allah has promised you succour, and Allah's Promise is true.' When the True Lord *the Most High* loosens the reins of those who disbelieve, He only wants to bring out all that they have so that they will have no further excuse. Then, He will confront them with some of that which they deserve in this worldly life, and they will see the rest in the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Our word has already been given to Our servants, the messengers. It is they who will be helped, and the ones who support Our cause will be the winners.' (*as-Saffat*: 171-173)

From the life story⁽¹⁾ of 'Ali Allah *be pleased with him* we learned that he was sorely tried by two groups: the *Khawarij* who called him a disbeliever and the *Shi'a* who deified him and elevated him to the status of prophethood so that the words of the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*

(1) *The story of 'Ali Allah be pleased with him with one of the Kharijites in the Fajr Prayer*

to him came true, 'Two shall be ruined through you: the one who loves too much and the one who hates and scorns.'⁽¹⁾

It is also narrated that he *Allah be pleased with him* was leading the people in the dawn prayer one day, and when he recited, '...nor of those who go astray' (*al-Fatiha*: 7), one of the *Kharijites* approached him and recited, 'It has already been revealed to you [O, Prophet] and to those before you, "If you ascribe any partner to Allah, all your work will come to nothing. You will be one if the losers."' (*az-Zumar*: 65). What he means he means by this is, 'You are a disbeliever, and your works will not be accepted from you.' 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* quickly realised what the man intended by this and immediately recited: 'so be patient, for Allah's promise is true. Do not let those with no firm beliefs discourage you.' (*ar-Rum*: 60) This means the following, 'You shall not remove me from my composure and my forbearance, and you shall not disquiet my mind.'

The greatness of this event was that he spontaneously replied with the most appropriate answer from the Book of Allah without any preparation or arrangement. Why does this seem surprising when he was 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* who was given such a vast amount of eloquence, articulacy, and skilled reasoning?

As for the Words, *la yoqinun*, '... those with no firm beliefs ...' (*ar-Rum*: 60), the word *yoqinun* is derived from *yaqin* (certainty) which means firm faith that cannot be shaken, so that it becomes a belief inside the heart that does not surface to the mind to be reasoned any further.

(1) 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him called me over and said, "There is in you the likeness of Jesus. The Jews hated him so much that they slandered his mother, and the Christians loved him so much that they elevated him to status which was not his." Indeed, two kinds of people shall be ruined through me: those who love so much that they praise me for things which are not mine, and those who have such hatred for me that they slander me. Indeed, I am not a prophet, and no revelation comes to me, but I act according to Allah's Book and the Sunna of His Prophet peace and blessings be upon him as much as I am able.' Narrated by Al-Haytami in *Majma' Az-Zawid* ix. 133, where he ascribed it to Bazzar and Abu Ya'la Al-Mawsuli.

the chapter of

Luqman

In the Name of God⁽¹⁾, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *Luqman*⁽²⁾:



Alif. Lam. Mim [1] (The Quran, *Luqman*: 1)

Previously, we spoke at great length about the disjointed letters that appear at the beginning of many *suras*, or chapters. In our discussion, we offered all that is humanly possible in terms of discerning the meaning of these letters. Our only recourse at this point is to say that Allah *Glorified is He* knows best as to what He intends by mentioning them. Indeed, it really makes no difference what level of knowledge we are granted; we will never be able to offer anything conclusive about these letters. In the end, there will always remain shades of meaning—in their usage—that we are simply incapable of arriving at.

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- (1) The Islamic conception of 'Allah' is not the same as the Christian and Jewish conception of 'God'. However, the word 'Allah' does not refer to a tribal god or God of only Muslims, it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however to use 'Allah' rather than 'God' as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.
 - (2) The chapter of *Luqman* is the 31st chapter within the current arrangement of the scripture. It contains 34 verses and is classified as a Meccan chapter: it was revealed after the chapter of *as-Saffat* and before the chapter of *Saba*'. Concerning the chapter, Qurtubi, in his book *Tafsir* (meaning explanation), mentions: It is entirely a Meccan surah (chapter) apart from just two verses. Qatada counted the first of them as the following: 'And if all of the trees on earth were pens ...' (*Luqman* 27). Along with this, he counts the subsequent verse. Ibn Abbas considers the chapter Meccan apart from three verses: he concurred with Qatada concerning the first two, but also adds to them the verse: 'Art thou not aware that it is Allah Who makes the night grow longer by shortening the day and makes the day grow longer by shortening the night ...' (*Luqman* 29).

If, however, one was to ask: 'What is the benefit of these disjointed letters if their meaning cannot be known?' we would respond by pointing out: First of all, our rebuttal is based on logic and reasoning. The Quran was revealed upon the linguistic patterns of the Arabs. Linguistically, it challenged them, while they were indeed a people of marked eloquence, rhetoric, and clear exposition. They were the possessors of expressions of exquisiteness and styles of marvel. Additionally, the Quran was revealed in the dialect of the Quraysh who within their unique dialect had joined amongst all of the various dialects of Arabic being spoken at the time. Amongst the people of Quraysh were those who most notoriously rejected Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and proclaimed that he was a liar. Yet, we have never heard of any of them disdainfully questioning: 'What is the meaning of "Alif Lam Mim" or "Ha Mim"?"

By Allah, if these letters provided any occasion to attack the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or the Quran, they would not have neglected the chance to exploit it. Therefore, this should be considered evidence that they understood the meaning of these letters. Clearly, they knew these letters contained meaning; if nothing else, we can certainly say they are 'ways of attracting attention' which were used amongst the Arabs. In this, the disjointed letters would be similar to *ala* (ho), which was mentioned by a poet⁽¹⁾ in the following selection:

Ho! Rise from sleep O, (female) sommelier, and from your chalice, pour me my morning drink.

Don not hoard the wines of this town of Al-Andarun.

Ala is used to attract attention. Attracting attention at the beginning of a speech shows that the speaker has control over the logic behind what he is saying; so, he arranges and prepares his speech and intellectually manages

(1) The poet whose work is being referenced here is 'Amr ibn Kulthum ibn Malik ibn 'itab Abu Al-Aswad. He is one of the poets of the pre-Islamic period; he was born in the northern region of the Arabian Peninsula in a township known as Rabia. During his times, people would see him travel about the area of his birth as well as the Eastern Mediterranean, Iraq and Najd. In addition to his prominence as a poet, he was also known as a valiant warrior. His most widely known piece of poetry was that which received the honour of being posted in the *Ka'ba*. This verse is extracted from that poem. He died sometime around 40 B.H. (*The Quran, Al-'Alam* 5/84, *Az-Zirikli*).

things in his own mind. On the other hand, the listener could be totally heedless and unprepared so that he ends up being surprised by the speech, and even may miss some of it. Thus, ways of attracting attention (like *ala*) come in handy; they remove the listener from his state of heedlessness and capture his attention. At full attention, he would not miss any part of the speech. As such, the easiest of all possible scenarios dealing with these ‘disjointed letters’ that we can imagine will admit that they are the ‘ways of attracting attention’ which Arabs commonly used in their speech.

Earlier, we explained that the entire Quran—in its original revelation—was sent down as one continuous revelation. This implies that its verses and chapters run together. In fact, even its ending should be connected with its beginning; for instance, as soon as we reach the last verse in the Quran reading, ‘...whether they be jinns or people.’ (*an-Nas*: 6), we follow it by the first verse of the Quran: ‘In the name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy! Praise belongs to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.’ (*al-Fatiha*: 2) Here, we have the very beginning of the Quran recited directly after the end of the Quran. Hence, in all of the verses of the Quran as well as its chapters, the unbroken arrangement of the scripture is maintained. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* does not want you to separate any particular verse of the Quran from that which follows it. This explains why they refer to an expert reciter of the Quran as ‘one in a constant state of travel’. Indeed, he finds himself situated in a certain verse or chapter but not soon after, he ‘journeys’ to the verse which follows it.

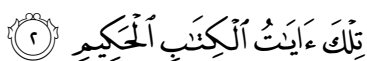
In essence, we are able to conclude that connectedness is a general characteristic of the Quran. The only exceptions to this general characterisation we find are the ‘disjointed letters’ which appear at the beginning of the chapter. As their name reveals, they are disconnected from each other. We would not, for instance, say, ‘*Alifun Lamun Mimun*’ using Arabic diacritics. No; however, the proper way to recite those letters is ‘*Alif. Lam. Mim.*’ Then, why are these letters at variance with the connectedness which generally characterises the Quran?

Many have mentioned that this has been done to indicate that *Alif* as well as *Lam* and *Mim* all have independent meanings. This would suggest that they

are not simply Arabic characters like the other ones that make up the text of the Quran. This is why they are recited differently than the other letters of the Quran; they are disjointed because they convey meanings that are independent of that which precedes and follows them.

This explains the statement of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Whoever reads a single character of the Book of Allah shall be granted a reward equal to ten times the amount he reads, and bears in mind, I do not consider *Alif. Lam. Mim* to represent one character, On the contrary, *Alif* is a character, *Lam* is a character, and *Mim* is a character.'⁽¹⁾

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:



**These are the verses of the wise Scripture [2]
(The Quran, *Luqman*: 2)**

The word *tilka*, or 'These are' is a demonstrative pronoun that corresponds with a feminine object (its male counterpart is *dhalika*). When we analyse the word piece by piece, we find that the Arabic character *Ta* that appears at the beginning of the word is for pointing (to the person or thing which is being indicated), while the character *Lam* conveys a certain sense of distance between the speaker and that object—this distance could be physical, emotional or related to status. Lastly, the character *Kaf* which indicates that someone or something is being addressed in the second person. The *kaf* usually corresponds to the person or thing being addressed; so it will be masculine or feminine in the singular, dual or plural.

For example, addressing someone or something in the masculine/singular form, you would say, *tilka*. In the feminine/singular, on the other hand, you would say, *tilki*. In the dual form, you would say, *tilkuma*. An example of this can be found in the statement that the wife of the nobleman Zulaykha made in reference to Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*: '..."This is the one you blamed

(1) Narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his *Sunnan* 2910 from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Abdullah ibn Mas'ud. Concerning the authenticity of the Hadith, he said that related in this particular way, the Hadith is *hasan, sahih and gharib*.

me for ...” (*Yusuf*: 32). The word *fadhalikunna*, or ‘This’ is a demonstrative pronoun. In it, the character *dha* is representative of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*; the *Lam* as used in *li* conveys a sense of distance, while *kunna* is the pronoun that corresponds to a feminine/plural audience.

Addressing Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...”These shall be two signs from your Lord ...”’ (*al-Qasas*: 32). This is a reference to the two signs: the shining hand and the staff. The word *dhanika*, or ‘These’ is a demonstrative pronoun. The first portion *dhan* indicates that the object being referred to is in the dual form, while the character *Kaf* indicates that someone is being addressed in the second person in this case, Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*.

The demonstrative pronoun here within the verse we are currently exploring, ‘These are the verses ...’ (*Luqman*: 2) is being used to refer to a feminine object: ‘the verses’. The individual being addressed in second person is the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and an address to him is considered an address to his community after him. At times, the Quran refers to the verses that make up the scripture, and at other times it refers to the Book itself. So, we find the words, the Book, *Al-Furqan* (the Criterion) or the Quran, being used; each of these has a particular meaning.

The word *Al-Kitab* (the Book) refers to the fact that the scripture is written and contains lines. The term the Quran refers to the fact that the scripture is recited and contains sections. As for the term *Al-Furqan* (the Criterion), it refers to one of the functions of the scripture: to decisively separate the truth from falsehood.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘These are the verses of the wise Scripture.’ (*Luqman*: 2) Thus, He describes the scripture as wise. However, at the beginning of the chapter of *al-Baqara* (The Cow), He says: ‘This is the Scripture in which there is no doubt, containing guidance ...’ (*al-Baqara*: 2). In this verse, the Quran is not described the wise Quran; the possibility of it containing doubt or misgiving is negated instead. The phrase, ‘...in which there is no doubt ...’ (*al-Baqara*: 2) confirms the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in conveying what he received from Allah *Glorified is He*. It also confirms the truthfulness of the angel who carried

the revelation from the preserved tablet unto Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This angel was praised by Allah *the Exalted* within the following statement: 'Who possesses great strength and is held in honour by the Lord of the Throne.' (*at-Takwir*: 20)

Concerning our master, the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*—in respect to the conveyance of the Quran—Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'If [the Prophet] had attributed some fabrication to Us, We would certainly have seized his right hand and cut off his lifeblood.' (*al-Haqq*: 44-46)

Thus, the Quran is the same Quran that descended from Allah *Glorified is He*; not a single character of its text has been changed, and it will remain preserved by the permission of Allah *the Exalted* until the establishment of the Final Hour. We will continue reading: '...in which there is no doubt ...' (*al-Baqara*: 2) and those who will come after us will continue reading this statement in the Quran until the establishment of the Final Hour as well. The True Lord Himself has decreed that no doubt will be allowed to approach this Quran; this guarantee has stood from the time it was first revealed and will continue until the Last Hour. If we are troubled by even the slightest bit of doubt concerning the Book of our Lord, we only have to read and contemplate the following: 'This is the Scripture, in which there is no doubt, containing guidance for those who are mindful of Allah.' (*al-Baqara*: 2)

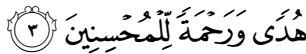
This is a conclusive decree (that the Quran would remain preserved) which Allah *the Almighty* issued, and it will remain as long as the world is in existence; the verse we mentioned before reads: 'We shall show them Our signs in every region of the earth and in themselves...' (*Fussilat*: 53) encompasses the future: the future of those who witnessed the revelation of the Quran, the future of those who come after the revelation of the Quran, the future of those who will come after the previously mentioned until the Day of Judgment and even the future of those upon which the Hour will come.

Allah *Glorified is He* did not reveal the Quran to uncover all its secrets and miracles in a certain period of time only, nor did He reveal it to one community only, depriving all successive generations of His giving. Allah *the Most High* wants the Quran to remain fresh and continually renewed; every community

and historical epoch will derive something meaningful from it and uncover its secrets, miracles, and signs within creation.

As for the meaning of His Words, ‘...the wise Scripture’ (*Luqman*: 2), a book cannot be described as wise; only someone who is knowledgeable can be described so. Thus, ‘the wise Scripture’ refers to the All-Wise, the one who speaks in this book and He who revealed it. The word *Al-Hakim* (wise) means He who puts things in their proper places. The only One Who can put everything in its proper place is Allah *the Almighty* for He knows the true purpose of everything and where it belongs.

By contrast, we humans think that a certain place is the proper one for something, and then afterwards, we discover that we have been wrong, and accordingly, we are forced to make changes and modifications. An example of this is many of the new inventions that we had thought were serving humanity and later witnessed and suffered from their harmfulness. Each verse reflects an aspect of the Quran’s perfection and a feature of its magnificence. In essence, the Quran is a collection of different parts of one big structure that has several faculties of perfection. The next verse is an example of multiple perfections:



**[with] guidance and mercy for those
who do good [3] (The Quran, *Luqman*: 3)**

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘[With] guidance and mercy for those who do good.’ (*Luqman*: 3), whereas in the opening of the chapter of *al-Baqara*, He says: ‘...containing guidance for those who are mindful of Allah.’ (*al-Baqara*: 2) There is a difference between the two meanings: being mindful of Allah that requires faith and faith that requires complying with the obligations, i.e. to perform what Allah *the Almighty* has made as an obligation upon you.

Ihsan (doing of good) requires more than that. *Ihsan* in performance means to excel in doing something in matter of quantity as well as quality. The quality of a particular act is increased when it is accompanied by sincerity toward the One for Whom the action is being performed: The True

Lord *the Most High*. To excel in doing something, in matter of quantity, is to truly love the obligation you are performing, which will lead you to move beyond the obligation and start performing extra worship. So, instead of praying a mandatory two units of prayer, you might perform an additional unit or two of prayer. This is how *ihsan* is expressed in regards with quantity.

Taqwa (being mindful or conscious of Allah) is one of the wonders of Quranic exegesis. The Quran uses exactly the same word when saying '*ittaqu Allah*' (be conscious of Allah) and '*ittaqu An-nar*' (be conscious of the fire of Hell). The meaning, after close study is you being conscious of the fire of Hell that entails that you will make sure that there is a barrier and a protective blockade between you and it. Being conscious of Allah does not indicate that you make a barrier between you and your Lord because a believer always seeks togetherness with Allah.

Alternatively, place a protective barrier between you and the attributes of Allah *Glorified is He* which tell of His overpowering awesomeness. Place a protective barrier between yourself and Allah's Attributes of retribution, force, overwhelming dominance, etc. This is due to you not being able to withstand the manifestations of these Attributes. There is no doubt that the fire of hell is merely one of Allah's forces. It is a manifestation of Allah's Attributes of overpowering awesomeness. The meaning, then, is exactly the same.

Nonetheless, some people limit their search for meaning to the obvious and ask, 'How can we be conscious of Allah in the same way we are conscious of the fire of Hell? Does this type of consciousness not imply putting distance between oneself and something harmful?' We would respond by stating, that it is indeed correct. The harmful thing you are getting away from is disbelief. In fact, this is the very essence of being mindful of Allah. Those who are conscious of Allah are those who find contentment in being aware of Him, by always guarding against disbelief in Him. As long as people is guarding against disbelief with this type of vigilance, they should be considered *muhsinin* 'doers of good' and true believers. At times, the Quran introduces an obligation, and at other times, it introduces those who are obligated; each renders a new meaning.

That is why when the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was questioned about *ihsan*—in the famous Noble Hadith by the Angel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*—he responded, ‘It is to worship Allah as though you see Him, and if you cannot see Him, know that He sees you.’⁽¹⁾

When we compare the beginning of the chapter of *al-Baqara* with this verse, ‘[with] guidance and mercy for those who do the good’ (*Luqman*: 3), we arrive at the conclusion that the Quran does not depend on repetition. Truthfully speaking, it contains miraculous scenes representing different meanings. Although there are some who, on account of their shallow understanding, assume that this is an instance of repetition in the Quran; the reality reveals that each verse is giving us something different when we think deeply about it.

In this verse, the Book has been described as wise; the fact that it is a source of guidance and mercy has also been included. Guidance leads to goodness through the shortest possible route. Indeed, the Quran had descended for the purpose of guiding a people who had gone astray, and after it had guided them to the right path, it had shown them the light; it had wanted to preserve the guidance for them and maintain its presence amongst them. The ‘...mercy ...’ (*Luqman*: 3) that is mentioned in the verse refers to Allah’s being merciful to them and not allowing them to return to disbelief again.

Another example of this can be observed in the following statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘We send down the Quran as healing and mercy to those who believe ...’ (*al-Isra*: 82). This asserts that the Quran is a healing for those who are sick, but it also mentions that the Quran is ‘a mercy to those who believe’: This implies that after getting well, they will not ever, by the mercy of Allah, get sick after that.

(1) The authenticity of this Hadith is agreed upon. Al-Bukhari narrated it in his Sahih 50. Muslim also narrated it in his Sahih 8. The Hadith was narrated on the authority of ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* and in its full version it is known as the Hadith, of Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*—the Hadith in which he appears in the form of a man whose clothes were exceedingly white, hair exceedingly black, without any signs of travelling showing upon his person. The Hadith also makes clear that no one had ever seen the man before and that he proceeded to ask Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about Islam, faith (*Iman*) and spiritual excellence or the doing of good (*Ihsan*).

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ بِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُونَ ﴿٤﴾

**Who keep up the prayer, pay the prescribed
alms, and are certain of the Hereafter [4]
(The Quran, *Lugman*: 4)**

This verse comes as a description of the *muhsinin* (doers of good). Nonetheless, do these represent all of their characteristics: being constant in prayer, paying the prescribed alms and being certain of Hereafter? They replied in the negative. Rather, these are the foundational aspects of their characteristics. The True Lord *the Most High* wants that His creation stand on an equal footing regarding worship. Indeed, this equality in worship will not materialise unless it does so as an extension of their overall equality.

In prayer, this equality is manifest ever so precisely. In prayer, the Exaltedness of Lordship is evident and the inherent humbleness of being a servant. Prayer represents the fullest expression of submission and humility before Allah *Glorified is He* and is performed repeatedly: five times throughout the day and night.

As for other religious obligations, they would not be described this way. So, paying the poor-due, for instance, is only an obligation once a year: ‘...paying what is due on the day of harvest...’ (*al-An‘am*: 141). Additionally, the payment of the poor-due is only an obligation for those who are able to pay it. The same can be said of fasting during the month of *Ramadan* and making the Great Pilgrimage to Mecca. This creates the impression that prayer is the cornerstone of all worship. On account of its goodness and high priority with Allah *the Exalted* He has made it an obligation upon every believer. There is no situation in which a believer is freed from the responsibility of praying. To be sure, there is a specific legislation that handles the prayer of the infirm, travelling, one in fear, etc.

To be sure, prayer brings about ‘*istitraq*’ of being a servant (which means all kinds of people, including the poor, rich, etc., share the same behaviour of submission to Allah, standing in prayer in ranks) for the entire creation. When the time of prayer commences, we cast off our statuses just as we cast off our shoes and leave them at the door of the mosque. During prayer, in a line of worshippers, you find the leader as well as the one being led; the old and the

young; the noble and those of humble standing. However, when pointing to certain people as being of humble standing, it is important that we clarify what we mean (only in the eyes of people this person is viewed as being of humble standing) with his Lord, his standing might not be humble at all. Nevertheless, what we are attempting to convey here is that all are equal. Surely, when we observe eminent personalities, rulers and leaders standing with us in ranks, all in submission to Allah *Glorified is He* and being totally humbled before Him, the differences that separate us dissipate. Any of the conceit that might have taken root in their souls abates: Indeed, in the Muslim community, no one has any business treating anyone else in a condescending manner.

Also, due to the high standing of prayer and its importance, we recognise that it is the only religious obligation that Allah *the Almighty* made binding on us by issuing a declaration directly from Himself. Conversely, all of the other religious obligations were clarified through the medium of revelation. Earlier, we attempted to give an analogy for this difference: We mentioned a manager in the workplace; when he receives an important notice, he does not issue it through his secretaries or by telephone. To be sure, he will summon the particular employee the matter concerns to his office and give him the order directly.

This also applies to the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; His Lord summoned him to the heavens, and he experienced the tremendous favour of being near to Allah *the Most High*. Certainly, Allah *Glorified is He* knows Muhammad's love for his community and his desire to see them guided aright. He also knows that His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* desires for his entire community to experience the sublimity of nearness to Him, nearness like that Prophet Muhammad experienced during The Night Journey, and with being in His presence.

In light of this, his Lord addressed the following statement to him: 'your Lord is sure to give you so much that you will be well satisfied.' (*ad-Duha*: 5) The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* responded, 'Then, I will not be pleased, while a member of my community dwells in the fire of Hell.'⁽¹⁾

(1) Narrated by Khatib in *Talkhis Al-Mutashabih*; on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him who said, 'Muhammad will not be pleased while one member of his=

Just as prayer brings about '*istitraq*' of being a servant (that means all kinds of people, including the poor, rich, etc., share the same behaviour of submission to Allah, standing in prayer in ranks), so does the payment of the poor-due when it generates 'economical *istitraq*'. Thus, all people, which include the rich and the poor, will have a decent, easy life. In this way, no single person will overeat to the point of indigestion while another dies of hunger. Then, what do you think of a community in which the elders do not treat the youth with disdain and in which the wealthy do not withhold their support from the impoverished? As such, we can confidently state that the establishment of the prayer and the payment of the poor-due can maintain happiness for the entire community.

Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* has made the payment of the poor-due an obligation, for when He brings His servant into existence, He takes it upon Himself the responsibility of providing him with life's essentials. How could He decline to do so when you, the human, invite someone to your home; do you not assume the responsibility of treating him with generosity and providing him with at least the bare essentials, not to mention a warm reception, good hospitality, appetising food and drink, etc.?

Allah *the Exalted* has summoned all His servants forth into existence: not only believers amongst them, but disbelievers as well. Thus, it is Allah's responsibility to guarantee provision for all of them. In fact, more than just basic provision, it is Allah's responsibility to provide them with all of things on which life's quality rests. Additionally, Allah *Glorified is He* grants this guarantee to the disabled just as He grants it to the able-bodied. For this reason, the payment of the poor-due has been made a binding religious obligation for him who begs and for him who is denied. While paying the poor-due is *silat* (represents the strong social bonds that Islam fosters amongst believers), praying is *salat*.

In Arabic literature, there is a story which demonstrates this principle. It is narrated that Ibn Al-Mudbir who is also known by Abu Al-Hassan, was sought

= community dwells in the fire of Hell.' In *Shu'ab Al-iman*, Al-Bayhaqi also narrated this Hadith on the authority of Ibn Abbas, but with a slightly different wording; it reads: 'His- the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him- contentment resta in every member of his community being admitted to Paradise.'

after by the poets of his time so that they could benefit from his generosity. They would say, 'Nothing opens the mouths like giving.' That is to say that bestowal will cause people to praise you.

Nevertheless, when Ibn Al-Mudbir⁽¹⁾ was praised in a piece of poetry that he did not like, he would order his men to take the poet to the mosque and remain with him until he completed one hundred units of prayer. Due to this practice, the poets of his time feared him and in many cases were afraid to approach him. The only one of them who defied this general attitude was Abu 'Abdullah Al-Husayn ibn 'Abd As-Salam Al-Bashri who went to him and said, 'I have some poetry that I would like to recite to you.' Ibn Al-Mudbir answered, 'However, there is one condition. Do you have any idea what it is?' 'Yes,' he quickly responded. 'Very well then, recite what you have,' it was said to him. So, he began:

We wanted a good praise for Abu Hassan ... As the praise of the governors

(Poets were going to them in order to benefit from their largesse.)

He continued the poem:

We said, 'the most generous of all men and jinn' ...and from his palms the Tigris and Euphrates emerge'

They said, 'He receives the eulogisers very well, but His reward to them is prayer.'

So, I said, 'My praying will not enrich my children. No, it is charity I hope to encourage'

So, he will order that the word salat (prayer) be changed and turn it to become silat (building a bond with me by being generous to me)

Afterward, someone found the courage to approach Ibn Al-Mudbir and questioned, 'Why do you punish the one whose poetry does not impress you by commanding him to perform one hundred units of prayer?' He responded, 'Indeed, each poet who approaches me is either a good composer of poetry or a bad one. If he is a bad composer, consider the one hundred

(1) *The story of Ibn Al-Mudbir with the poets*

units of prayer expiation for his bad poetry. If, on the other hand, he is a good composer, the units of prayer serve as expiation for the lies he told about me during his performance.'

In the verse we are studying Allah *Glorified is He* then says describing them as: '...certain of the Hereafter.' (*Luqman*: 4) Truthfully speaking, faith in the Last Day means that we must act according to the Way of Allah *Glorified is He*—presented in 'do' and 'do not do' such-and-such—while being confident that there is no way to escape Allah *the Almighty* or evade His Punishment in the Hereafter, for we will be called to account. This is because we were not created without purpose, nor will we be left to wander blindly through life. Allah *Glorified is He* captures this reality when he says: 'Did you think We had created you in vain and that you would not be brought back to Us?' (*al-Mu'minun*: 115)

In terms of the rhetorical style being employed in this verse, we notice that the detached personal pronoun *hum* (they) has been used twice: Again, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '*hum bil'akhirati hum yuqinun*' '...and are certain of the Hereafter.' (*Luqman*: 4) This should be taken as an indication that belief in the Hereafter is confirmed, and there is no doubt in its occurrence. Though people believe in that day and are sure that they will be called for account; furthermore, they believe that Allah did not hold them responsible for no purpose for the True Lord still explicitly emphasises this issue of the Hereafter. This is because it is an issue that most people see as being far-off, and as a result, they often fail to take heed of it. However, this is not surprising: people are heedless of death although they witness it before their eyes daily. Humans are apt to see death as far-off in relation to them. This provides a good context for the statement of Al-Hasan Al-Basri⁽¹⁾ which reads: 'I have never witnessed a type of certainty that is as similar to doubt as people's certainty of their own mortality.'

(1) *He is Al-Hasan ibn Abu Al-Hasan Abu Sa'id Al-Basri Allah be pleased with him. He was raised in Medina, during the caliphate of 'Uthman. He memorized the Book of Allah and even heard 'Uthman deliver a couple of addresses. He was a scholar, high-minded, reliable, and secure. He was also devoted worshipper and a man of great spiritual presence. It has also been said that he was handsome, eloquent and elegant. He died in 110 AH at the age of 88. (The Quran, Tadhkirat Al-Hufazh 1/71, Adh-Dhahabi)*

As for disbelievers, they openly proclaim their disbelief in this day and incredulity concerning it. This is why Allah *the Almighty* emphasises it.

When the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* questioned Hudhayfa ⁽¹⁾ *Allah be pleased with him* 'How are you this morning, Hudhayfah?' The latter responded, 'I woke up as a true believer.' 'Every truth has its manifestations so what are the manifestations of your belief?' asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Hudhayfa *Allah be pleased with him* answered, 'My soul has turned away from the life of this world. Its gold and its crumbled pieces of soil have become as one for me. It is almost as if I can see the people of paradise enjoying the comforts that exist within it, and I can see the people in the fire of Hell being punished.' The Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then said to him, 'Now you know. So, stick to the truth as long as you live.'

Allah's phrase, '...are certain ...' (*Luqman*: 4), refers to certainty in the Hereafter. Certainty describes the state in which faith is deeply rooted and unwavering. This state does not admit the possibility of doubt rising to the intellect to be considered anew. Previously, we pointed out that all things that can be known are essentially known at three levels or phases: '*ilm al-yaqin*, '*ain al-yaqin* and *haqq al-yaqin*.

As for '*ilm al-yaqin* (the knowledge of certainty), it occurs when someone whom you trust informs you of something. When you personally observe what that individual informed you about, it becomes '*ain al-yaqin* (the eye of certainty). When you are directly involved past the level of merely witnessing or observing, it becomes *haqq al-yaqin* (the truth of certainty).

We have given an analogy for this: the Sacred House in Mecca, for instance, was such-and-such details, and it underwent such-and-such expansions. As far

(1) *What is narrated is mentioned in relation to Al-Harith ibn Malik Al-Ansari: It was cited by Haythami in Mujma' Az-Zawa'id 1/57. In Al-Mujma' Al-kabir 3/302, Haythami also upheld the authenticity of what had been narrated by At-Tabarani. He said concerning its chain of narrators: 'The chain includes Ibn Lahia.' To nearly the same effect, it is narrated on the authority of Anas ibn Malik, 'The Prophet met a man who was referred to as Harith in some of the passes of Medina and said to him, "How did you rise from sleep this morning, Harith?"' This version of the Hadith has graded as authentic by Al-Bazzar despite the fact that the chain includes Yusuf ibn 'Atiya who is not relied upon.*

as you are concerned, this knowledge represents *'ilm al yaqin* (the knowledge of certainty). If you were to see the Sacred House perhaps in a picture, you will have attained *'ain al-yaqin* (the eye of certainty). If Allah *the Exalted* facilitates your access to the Sacred House, and you are able to perform the Great Pilgrimage or even the Lesser Pilgrimage, you will have directly experienced being there, and your knowledge will have arrived to the level of *haqq al-yaqin* (the truth of certainty).

There are two chapters in the Quran, which the True Lord *the Most High* deals with these different levels of perceiving reality: 'Striving for more distracts you until you go into your graves. No indeed! You will come to know. No indeed! In the end you will come to know. No indeed! If only you knew for certain. You will most definitely see hellfire. You will see it with the eye of certainty. On that Day, you will be asked about your pleasures.' (*at-Takathur*: 1-8) This verse describes them when they will traverse the bridge of *Sirat*, which is when they will be able to see the fire of hell with their own eyes.

As for *haqq al-yaqin*, as it relates to the fire of hell, and its description occurs in the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'If that dying person is one of those who will be brought near to Allah, he will have rest, ease and a Garden of Bliss. If he is one of those on the Right, [he will hear], "Peace be on you" from his companions on the Right. However, if he is one of those who denied the truth and went astray, he will be welcomed with scalding water. He will burn in Hell. This is the certain truth. [O, Prophet] Glorify the name of your Lord, the Supreme.' (*al-Waqi'a*: 89-96)

Yet, did the Quran descend as guidance for all who are conscious of Allah or strictly solely for the 'doers of good'? We would respond by stating that guidance occurs in the Quran with two meanings: *hedayat dalalah wa irshad* (guidance to the correct way by being shown and instructed and *hedayat ma'unah* (guidance to the correct way by aid and facilitation). If we are speaking of the first type of guidance, it has been made accessible to all, the believer and the disbeliever. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'As for Thamud, We gave them guidance, but they preferred blindness in preference to guidance.' (*Fussilat*: 17) The True Lord *the Most High* has guided all to that

they are His servants; some have accepted this guidance and have been convinced thereby, whereas others have rejected it and made the conscious decision to disbelieve. As for those who accept this and believe in it, Allah *the Exalted* grants them additional guidance; He grants them Divine aid and facilitation in attaining faith. Afterward, He continues to make faith endeared to them until they find it irresistible. As their faith continues to deepen, Allah's assistance to help them realise their faith never ceases. Regarding this, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah has increased the guidance of those who follow the right path and given them their awareness [of Him].' (*Muhammad*: 17)

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

أُولَٰئِكَ عَلَىٰ هُدًى مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

These are rightly guided by their Lord, and it is they who will prosper[5] (The Quran, *Luqman*: 5)

The True Lord has already described the Quran as guidance, whereas in this verse He says: 'Those are on [right] guidance ...' (*Luqman*: 5). Bear in mind that the Speaker within the text is Allah *Glorified is He*. As such, we must carefully consider the meaning of this passage. Our Lord wants inform us that indeed the Quran is guidance. Nonetheless, by no means should you believe that you are benefitting Allah *the Almighty* by accepting and following His guidance. On the contrary, you are the beneficiary of your choice to follow His guidance. When you allow guidance to lead, it not only shows you where good lies but accompanies you to it. One can almost think of guidance as a riding animal that delivers you unto all that is good and wholesome. It is as though you are riding on guidance; thus, you rise above it, but in fact, it is over you because it lawfully places demands on your actions.

After establishing that the Quran is guidance, a question arises: 'From whom is guidance?' The answer is '...guidance from their Lord...' (*Luqman*: 5); it is He Who is not corrected by anyone. So, when He guides you, it is true guidance. Suppose that humans are guided to something that contains good, only to oppose that same very thing a short while later. Indeed, they might discover the harm and injury something contains only long after its development.

Maybe this will prompt them to come back and make amends to what had initially developed, or maybe they will abandon it to a new course of action. So, consider the amount of laws that had been developed by human beings and which then were cancelled or have been modified.

Therefore, true guidance can only come from Allah *Glorified is He* and the law that should govern us and in which we should feel confident can only come from Allah, *the Exalted*. Why is this? Without a doubt, humans benefit from the laws that were developed. Additionally, humans may likely succumb to vain desires or might unfairly incline towards a specific party as opposed to his adversary. By contrast, the True Lord is the Only One Who does not benefit from what He legislates for His servants at all, nor does He side with one party over another; to Him, all people are simply His servants, and they stand upon equal footing.

For this reason, the True Lord *the Most High* gives reassures us with the justice and equity that exist within the system of law that He has given us; He says: ‘...and that He—Exalted be the Glory of our Lord!—has neither spouse nor child.’ (*al-Jinn*: 3) This means that the True Lord has no companion who can influence his choices, nor does He have a son whom He will allow to wrong others and who would enjoy His protection and favour. Then, be assured that all of you are equal in His regard.

Furthermore, there is a difference between guidance from Allah and guidance from the Lord. The Lord is the One Who nurtures you; He is the One Who created you from nothing and provides for you, thereby removing you from deprivation. Your Lord gives you before you even knew that you can ask Him! Your Lord granted you a dwelling in this world, exploring His creation and enjoying His blessings.

In the same sense, your Lord is teaching you not to ask Him about your provision for tomorrow (as though you are in doubt that it will be present); He provided for you before you even know how to ask! On top of that, He does not request anything from you today concerning the worship you are obligated to perform tomorrow. This emphasises the necessity of a slave to observe manners when dealing with His Lord *Glorified is He*. This makes it clear to us that Lordship — in the sense that Allah is our Lord—implies

giving. Godhood, on the other hand, entails its primary feature of issuing responsibilities and duties to creation.

Next, the True Lord offers one additional description of these people: '...and it is those who are successful.' (*Luqman*: 5) Attainment of a happy state or felicity is the outcome of their living in accordance with guidance. This is supported by Allah's statement: 'Truly, to a happy state shall attain the believers' (*al-Mu'minun*: 1). The Arabic word *falaah* is originally derived from the idea of cultivating the earth (*filaahat al-ard*) by planting, seeding, watering, etc. When the Quranic idiom uses the word to refer to good deeds, it is actually borrowing the word from its original context. The similarity between its meaning in the Quranic language and its original meaning is clear. A farmer throws a seed into fertile dirt, and his Lord multiplies it for him seven hundred times. The same is true for the one who performs good deeds; their reward is multiplied for him. A good deed is rewarded anywhere from ten to seven hundred times by Allah. Allah *Glorified is He* says in this connection: '...Allah grants manifold increase unto whom he wills, and Allah is infinite, All Knowing.' (*al-Baqara*: 261)

Read the following parable in the Book of Allah: 'The parable of those who spend their possessions for the sake of Allah is that of a grain out of which grows seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains, for Allah grants manifold increase unto whom He wills, and Allah is Infinite, All Knowing.' (*al-Baqara*: 261) There is an interesting conclusion that can be drawn here: If the earth—one of the creations of Allah—is giving a yield so plentiful, how vast is the giving of the One Who created it? In this, we can see that they are indeed in a state of felicity; that is, they will reap the good fruits of their labour. When compared with the fruit that they will earn, the hardship and struggle that they faced—in order to grow the fruits—will seem like nothing. As we said earlier, this is similar to a farmer who cultivates his land and plants his seeds to be given manifold increase in what he planted at the time of harvest.

Afterward, the True Lord *the Most High* says⁽¹⁾:

(1) *There are factors that surrounded the revelation of this verse, and Kalbi and Muqatil have mentioned: This verse was revealed in reference to An-Nadr ibn Al-Harith. He=*

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَشْتَرِي لَهْوَ الْحَدِيثِ لِيُضِلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ
بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَيَتَّخِذَهَا هُزُوًا أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ ﴿٦﴾

But there is the sort of person who pays for distracting tales, intending, without any knowledge, to lead others from God's way, and to hold it up to ridicule. There will be humiliating torment for him! [6] (The Quran, *Luqman*: 6)

The True Lord *the Most High* has mentioned the Book and its verses; affirming that there are guidance and grace in them for those who follow their instructions. Allah *the Exalted* has also made clear that he who proceeds on the path of guidance can be assured that he will enjoy felicity. Now, He is highlighting the fact that there is another category of people: those who benefit and profit from misguidance, along with that what makes misguidance spread amongst people with its different forms.

From this, we recognise that there are particular groups of people whose luxuries in life are inextricably linked to the survival and proliferation of misguidance. The presence of misguidance could be needed to maintain their earnings and leadership, or—perhaps more disappointingly—the enslavement of others and the ability to seize the fruits of their labour.

Of course, if there is a law that would aid in bringing some balanced improvement to the public, in the sense that it contains good for many different groups of people, none would fight its enactment and contest those who advocate it except such people.. They go about making false accusations and trying to cast doubt onto their intentions. However, what is even more

= would travel to Persia on business and pay to gain access to some of the information and knowledge that was in circulation amongst the Persians. Once obtained, he would narrate what he learnt to others and would particularly seek out members of the tribe of Quraysh to prevail upon, he would say to them, 'So, Muhammad tells you of stories concerning 'Ad and Thamud, I will tell you the stories of Rustum, Asfندیار, and other Persian kings.' They became fond of his storytelling and would listen to him instead of listening to the Quran. This verse was revealed to address his activities.

Mujahid, on the other hand, holds the opinion that this verse was revealed about the purchase of slaves and chanteuses and that were used to distract people from the revelation of the Quran. [Asbab An-Nuzul pg. 197, Wahidi]

despicable is that they even begin to combat them by the use of ridicule and sarcasm and at other times by outright transgressing on their rights.

They may also try to make life impossible for those who support the good—by cutting off their access to necessities. This is similar to what they attempted to do with the Messenger of Allah when they ostracised him in the fields of Abu Taleb. Moreover, they forced the people of truth to migrate and make them leave behind their families and property to take up residence first in Ethiopia and then in Medina. Why did they go to such great lengths to stop the progress of the truth? Indeed, their very lives depended on the continued presence of misguidance; as such, they were ready to give everything they had for its preservation.

Allah *the Almighty* informs us that these people who attempt to stifle the truth and impede the progress of the call to faith are fully aware that if they allowed people to have an unbiased listening to the Message of Allah and the one who calls for it, they would undoubtedly incline towards it. This is why they took such pains to ‘block’ the ears of the people and silence the logic of truth. They said to them: 'Do not listen to this Quran, rather talk frivolously about it.' (*Fussilat*: 26)

They only responded in this manner because they were well versed in the language of the Quran; they understood the beauty of its style, its amazing ability to reach the hearts of men and women and the clarity of its mode of expression. If the ear of someone with a true sense for Arabic language listened to the Quran, he cannot prevent himself from being affected by it and taken by its miracles which simply cannot be duplicated by human beings. Needless to say, this will lead him to faith.

If they could not dissuade someone from listening to the truth (the Quran), they would use distractions to effectively divert his attention from the truth to falsehood.

The phrase 'But amongst men ...' (*Luqman*: 6) includes the use of the word 'amongst' which, in this case, indicates that a particular group of people are being referred to: these are the ones who benefit from the preservation of misguidance. This is a group amongst the people who would be distressed at the idea of people assembling around one worldview, a common goal, and a

single source of guidance. Indeed, this assemblage would spell an end to their being distinguished and their ability to impose their will on others through oppression on earth. This explains why they would spare no effort in attempting to preserve misguidance: 'But amongst men there is many a one that prefers a mere play if words [to Divine Guidance], so as to lead [those] without knowledge astray from the Path of Allah ...' (*Luqman*: 6).

The word choice of Allah when He says: 'prefers' (*Luqman*: 6) is a translation of the Arabic word *shira'* which literally means 'purchasing' as people do concerning their transactions. Of course, in order to complete a transaction, there must be buying and selling; this means that you will pay a price in order to receive a commodity or saleable item in return. This is a basic description of transactions since the invention of currency. Before the invention of hard currency, however, people would complete their transactions through bartering one commodity for another. In this case, both items are sold and bought in the same time. The owners of such property, when engaged in a transaction, were simultaneously buyers and sellers.

We observe the same thing being expressed in the story of Yusuf (Joseph): 'And they sold him (*sharawhu*) for a paltry price –a mere few silver coins; thus, low did they value him.' (*Yusuf*: 20) Although a derivative of the word *shira* (which we already mentioned that it actually means 'purchasing') was used, the actual meaning indicates that they sold him.

We find another instance of the word acquiring this particular sense in the statement of Allah: 'But there is [also] a kind of man who would willingly sell (*yashri*) his own self in order to please Allah ...' (*al-Baqara*: 207). Again, this also means, 'he is willing to give, or "sell", his soul'. Accordingly, we can see that the verb *shara* occurs throughout the text with the meanings of buying or selling.

On the other hand, if the verb *shara* occurs on the pattern of *ishtara*, it specifically denotes the process of purchasing something for a price that is paid in cash. In this sense, Allah has mentioned: 'And, behold, amongst the followers of earlier revelation, there are indeed such as [truly] believe in Allah and in that which has been bestowed from on high upon you as well as in that which has bestowed upon them. Standing in awe of Allah, they do not barter away (*yashtaroon*) Allah's Messages for a trifling gain ...' (*Al-Imran*: 199).

We also find the statement of Allah: 'Behold, Allah has bought (*ishtara*) of the believers their lives and their possessions, promising them Paradise in return.' (*at-Tawba*: 111)

Normally, the Arabic character *Ba'* (which in this case would mean 'with') is attached to the item that was paid during a transaction. For instance, we would say, 'I bought such-and-such (with) this.'

When we seriously consider the statement of Allah, 'But amongst men there is many a one that prefers a mere play of words ...' (*Luqman*: 6), first we find that this process (of preferring to purchase a mere play of words) cannot be completed without searching for the thing that is being preferred. Next, the process is also in need of a price that one is willing to pay in order to acquire that which he prefers. They did not even purchase something that contained some benefit, '...a mere play of words ...' (*Luqman*: 6) is such an unworthy purchase: it is valueless.

Therefore, these individuals who wanted to get people away from Allah's Way carry the burden of both searching for the purchased thing and paying for it. Then, in light of the fact that they have contented themselves with such a worthless object, they must be described as losers. Yet, what is worse than this and even more agonising is the fact they have chosen this in opposition to the truth, the truth that they were given freely; Allah *the Exalted* has sent it to them with His Messenger, and they were not required to exert any effort nor pay any price for it. The truth came to them as a result of Allah's favour and will to honour them: '...Say [O, Prophet]: "No reward do I ask of you for this [Message] other than [that you should] love your fellow men..."' (*ash-Shura*: 23).

What is there that can even be said about the level of stupidity with which they are described! As for the word *lahw* 'passing delight' (translated here as 'a mere play of words'), the Quran mentions it and *la'ib* (play) in various places. *La'ib* was mentioned before *lahw* in many verses like the following: 'And nothing is the life of this world but a play (*la'ib*) and a passing delight (*lahw*), and the life in the Hereafter is by far the better one for all who are conscious of Allah. Will you not, then, use your reason?' (*al-An'am*: 32). Also, they are in Allah's statement: 'know ... that the life of this world is but a play (*laib*) and passing delight (*lahw*)...' (*al-Hadid*: 20). In the following verse of Allah,

lahw was mentioned before *laib*: '...the life of this world is nothing but a passing delight (*lahw*) and a play (*la'ib*) ...' (*al-'Ankabut*: 64). In two of the verses, references to *la'ib* precede those to *lahw*. Indeed, *la'ib* (play) is when you engage in an action without a purpose or objective. The activity of children is described as play; it is activity, but it is aimless. Often, we use the term 'child's play'. This term has become popular because a child plays before he has been charged with any serious responsibility; he does not engage in aimless play while neglecting other duties.

Nonetheless, when he reaches the age of maturity if idle play distracts him from performing his duties, it becomes *lahw* in this case. This is what is being indicated in the saying of Allah: 'Yet it does happen that when people become aware of [an occasion for] worldly gain or a passing delight, they rush headlong toward it and leave you standing [and preaching] ...' (*al-Jumu'a*: 11).

Hence, we can confidently state that *lahw* is something that contains no benefit but distracts you from that which is required of you.

The verse of the chapter of *al-'Ankabut*, in which *lahw* is mentioned before *la'ib*, implies that the activities that distract one from fulfilling religious responsibilities have reached their limit. People have become inundated with corruption and idle amusement; what has also occurred is distraction from responsibilities as a result of that has become far too common. Structuring the verse in this way strikes at the core of the issue more effectively than mentioning *la'ib* before *lahw*; indeed, play, *la'ib*, as opposed to *lahw* does not affect one's responsibilities.

Then again, what is this 'mere play of words' that they have purchased for diverting people's attention away from the truth and call to Islam? When they heard the Quran, they heard the stories of 'Ad and Thamud as well as the stories about Midyan and Pharaoh that recur throughout the Book. Their goal then was to divert the attention of the people—from the stories of the Quran—by providing them with similar alternatives.

One of them⁽¹⁾ (An-Nadr ibn Al-Harith) had travelled to Persia and returned with a collection of entertaining stories about Rustum and the Persian rulers

(1) *The story of the accursed Nadr ibn Al-Harith*

and kings of Himiar, These were stories that he purchased and returned with, and he arranged a special gathering for telling them. People would assemble to hear him relate the stories he had collected. Through these stories, he would divert the attention of the people from the truth that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* would unceasingly preach. In addressing the circumstances that occurred that lead to the revelation of this verse, a separate opinion offers that one of them hired a chanteuse to sing bawdy and ribald songs.

The meaning of '...a mere play of words ...' (*Luqman*: 6) is what scholars refer to as 'that which distracts from something that Allah has made a requirement'. Interestingly enough, even if something is not essentially a distraction in itself, it could still be considered *lahw*. For instance, some albeit purposeful work—perhaps within manufacturing, farming, etc.—can be considered forms of *lahw* if they prevent an individual from praying or performing some other task which Allah has made an obligation. Yet, there are some actions which are considered *lahw* in themselves, even if they do not distract you from your worship, such as singing.

Much has been written by the scholars of Islam about this particular topic, especially after singing began to be accompanied by music, instruments and obscene dances and gestures. The legal scholars of the past have issued their verdicts about this issue. However, contemporary legal scholars, those who want to create allowances within the issue, take only a small portion of what was written by past authorities and implement it in a way that these authorities never intended.

Yes, our scholars have permitted singing to create festive environments during weddings and feasts. In this, they relied on the statement the Prophet made to Abu Bakr As-Siddiq when the latter saw two slave-girls singing in the home of the Prophet and admonished them. He said, 'One of the instruments of Satan in the house of the Messenger of Allah?' The Prophet responded, 'Let them do, Abu Bakr. These are the days of celebration!'⁽¹⁾

(1) *This is a Hadith whose authenticity is agreed upon. Al-Bukhari narrated it in his Sahih (987). Muslim also narrated it in his Sahih (892) in the chapter of the two occasions of=*

They have also permitted the use of short songs which are used to lift up the spirits of troops when engaged in fighting. Likewise, they permitted the songs that are sung by labourers to provide themselves with comfort and rest, enabling them to forget the hardship of their work. Also, in this regard, they have allowed a woman to sing lullabies to her child as she puts him to sleep.

The songs that are used by cameleers in order to increase the speed of the camel's gait also fall within this category. We certainly cannot overlook the statement of the Prophet in which he said to Anjasha,⁽¹⁾ 'Be gentle. You are carrying fine porcelain!'⁽²⁾ The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* compared women, on account of their delicateness and fragility, to fine porcelain. If a camel moved about hastily by his singing, with the women, it would rattle the howdah and disturb them.

Therefore, in essence we can find no objection to every lyrical arrangement which is applied towards a noble end. As for those arrangements which stir the natural instincts of the human being, they are forbidden. Remember, here we are discussing songs solely made up of words. Indeed, the Creator *Glorified is He* knows the nature of the instincts that are a part of human beings. In fact, this is why they have been termed instincts *ghariza*; they represent responses

= celebration. The Hadith was narrated on the authority of 'A'isha. Within the narration that Muslim has narrated the wording states that they were 'singing the song that was sung by the Ansar the day the troops were dispatched'. That is to say that they were singing a song about bravery, war, skill in combat and other things which do not contain corruptive influences, as An-Nawawi explained in *Sharh Muslim*. The same can be derived from the version of the Hadith that asserts, 'They were not professional chanteuses.' An-Nawawi explains this by mentioning, 'This means that they were not from a troop of singers who sang the standard fare which consisted of things that stir emotions and ardour that which excites people to commit indecency, rhapsodizing about lost love and whatever else that moves the souls of men and women.'

- (1) Baladhari mentions that Anjasha was an Ethiopian who also went by the name Abu Mariya. He had a melodious voice and would sing cameleer tunes beautifully. [*Al-Isaba Fi Tamyiz As-Sahaba* 1/68 entry no.259]
- (2) This Hadith was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his *Sahih* (6202) and likewise by Muslim in his *Sahih* (2323). The Hadith was narrated on the authority of Anas ibn Malik who said, 'Umm Sulaym was with the women of the Prophet while one of the cameleers was carrying them in a howdah, when the Prophet cried out, "Yes, Anjasha! Move gently, you are carrying fine porcelain!"'

that take place within you without any outer effect. Instincts possess an irresistible power, that is to say, 'When they come knocking, you will answer the door.' If you are moved by an instinctual response, you could very well take part in something the outcome of which is less than praiseworthy.

Previously, we explained that perception is expressed within a human being on three successive levels: Initially, you perceive with your senses. Next, as a result of that initial perception, there is an emotional response that takes place within the soul. Finally, there is the drive that translates this emotional response into action.

Truly, it is from Allah's vast Grace that the Divine Law only confines one level of this entire process, namely the last stage, which is the action that results from the emotional response that takes place within the soul. The Divine Law states: 'Stop! Do not extend your hand toward that which does not belong to you.' To make this process clearer, earlier, we gave the analogy of a rose that you observe in a garden. In our scenario, we mentioned that you are pleased by the sight of the rose and feel attracted to it because of its fragrant scent. In the end, your intrigue becomes desire, and you adore the rose. As far as the Divine Law is concerned, this is fine. Yet, if you extend your hand in an effort to pick the flower, the Lawgiver tells you, 'Stop! It is not your right to pick the flower!'

Therefore, we can conclude that the Wise Lawgiver does not issue Divine Rulings in this process at the level of perception nor at the level of emotional response. The only exception to this rule is when a man looks at a woman who is not lawfully wedded to him; this is an occasion in which the levels of perception, emotional response, and action cannot be separated, for they all become one thing. Nonetheless, we want to address the question of why this is so.

Many have offered that a matter is never settled at a pleasing glance. The pleasing glance creates a special sensation within you. That sensation will keep affecting you until you will be left with no choice but act on it. In this sense, it is a Mercy from Allah on you that He issued a Divine Law in this matter from the beginning, to prevent you from even doing so much as looking intently at a member of the opposite sex. Indeed, if you look intently, you may be affected emotionally, and if your emotions are affected, you will desire to act according to their dictates. Once this is done, one of two things

will certainly become your lot: you will follow up the desire with action and thereby commit a sin that, in addition to personal degradation and degrading others, or you will be forced to restrain yourself (from acting), thereby placing yourself under undue emotional strain. Your Lord wants to not only protect you from sin but also from emotional pain; therefore, it is much safer for you to simply lower your gaze.

As this is the case, do not flatly and summarily say singing is permissible, rather look at the content of what is being sung; if it encourages praiseworthy feelings, it is permissible. On the other hand, if it stirs the sensual instincts, it is impermissible and is considered a type of falsehood. This would definitely apply to the genre of song in which past loves are recounted, their attractiveness and charms remembered. In fact, this is impermissible even if it is being expressed via a medium other than song. Also, if one adds musical accompaniment, melodies, and any indecent actions, the foulness of what he is doing only increases, and his sin becomes compounded.

As for what we hear today that they refer to as singing, it nearly always is accompanied by inappropriate movements, dances, depravity and loud clamorous music, and there is no doubt that it is impermissible.

As a matter of fact, anything that removes a human being from a state of thoughtfulness and dignity, i.e. it makes him disregarding of the demands of polished character, is impermissible. Another thing is that within the context we are discussing, singing is a function of the voice; if it transgresses to include other parts of the body like hands, legs, eyes, waist, etc. to excite and entertain, such behaviour is completely impermissible.

A sincere believer who is in control of himself should never say, 'Well, musicians impose such songs upon us.' This is absolutely not true. A believer has insight by which he is guided; he is able to distinguish between right and wrong and between truth and falsehood. You should be able to judge what you see and hear and even what your family sees and hears. Metaphorically speaking, the control levers are in your hands; if you want, you can choose to listen, and if you want, you can turn off the machine. This idea of there being an uncontrollable force exerted upon you does not justify your actions. No one is capable of forcing you to hear or see what you do not want.

During the month of *Ramadan*, for instance, we fast during the days and stand in prayer at night; it is a month of worship. As such, it is only right that we honour it appropriately by preserving not only the heightened respect that we have for it but also taking advantage of the elevated spiritual states that the month gives us the opportunity to attain. Nevertheless, there are still certain people who attempt to present us with different types of entertainment which run counter to the nature of fasting. If you ask these people (about what they are doing), they will respond, 'People have different tastes and temperaments. We are just providing them with what they like!'

However, a believer, on the other hand, is the caretaker of his own soul and in control of that which affects it. Hence, there is absolutely no reason to blame anyone else. The caretaking of your own soul is something which Allah has made your responsibility, and it is your duty to uphold it. If you succeed in this, you place in your own hands ninety-five percent of the things which affect your life; others only decide things in the remaining five percent.

Then again, that which is permissible within singing is conditioned by the idea that it does not become a habit. What this means is that it does not become a consistent practice or the most important element of a person's life. This explains the meaning of the Prophet's statement: 'Delight your heart, but only from time to time.'⁽¹⁾

These singers and chanteuses who, by dancing and performing all sorts of movements, add to the simple concept of singing a tune that is not inherently a part of it, and they have no idea that they are exciting the carnal instincts. This disproportionately affects young people who are not able to get married; these singers are lighting the fuse to some people's deepest feelings and jealousy. By doing so, they expose them to many harms.

Therefore, the matter is clear; we do not need to engage in a philosophical discourse in order to know the ruling on music or singing. Anything which excites

(1) Cited by Al-'Ajiluni in *Kashf Al-khafa'* (1/524); he attributed it to Daylimi and Abu Na'im and Qada'i on the authority of Anas (which connects the chain to the Prophet). He also mentioned that the Hadith that appears in Muslim as well as other Hadiths which reads: 'O Hanzhala, from time to time!' This is a reference to the same event. The latter Hadith was narrated on the authority of Hanzhala Al-Asyadi and narrated by Muslim in his *Sahih* (2750).

carnal passions and removes one from a state of thoughtfulness, moderation, and dignity is impermissible, and this represents the bottom line. It makes no difference whether it is only lyrics with no musical accompaniment, musical arrangement without lyrics or a musical arrangement which is accompanied by other things (that conform to the above description) that have nothing to do with singing.

Yet, the matter we still need to address is why have they burdened themselves and purchased a mere play of words? The reason is clear, as Allah says: '...so as to lead [those] without knowledge astray from the Path of Allah...' (*Luqman*: 6).

Someone who purchases meaningless entertainment to amuse himself limits his misguidance to himself. He is in a different category than someone who intends not only to follow a way of misguidance himself but also lead others down the same path. The latter of the two carries the burden of his misguidance and the misguidance of those who follow him down that path.

Allah's phrase, '...a mere play of words ...' is not limited to singing or speech in general. It also encompasses action. In fact, it might apply to action even more than speech. Allah's phrase, '...without knowledge...', indicates that they have not even a clue about anything, not even the basics of buying and selling. A true merchant is he who purchases the commodity which renders a benefit greater than the price he paid for it. These people, on the other hand, have purchased misguidance, which does not render any benefit. This explains why the True Lord *the Most High* says: '...and neither has their bargain brought them gain ...' (*al-Baqara*: 16).

The path (*As-sabil*) is the route which leads to good through the most direct way. This is the straight path that Allah is referring to when He mentions: 'Guide us to the straightway' (*al-Fatiha*: 6); indeed, this is even supported by what we learn in engineering: the shortest distance between two points is a straight line.

Consider Allah's saying: '...and turn it in to ridicule...'. Although in Arabic, originally the word which corresponds with 'it' in the translation is a feminine pronoun, this actually refers to the Path (*sabil*) of Allah. The word *sabil* can be masculine or feminine; if it is a reference to the word 'way' *tariq*, it becomes masculine, such as in Allah's statement: '...and though they may see the Path of rectitude, they do not choose to follow it...' (*al-A'raf*: 146). If,

however, the word occurs with the meaning of 'direction' (*shir'a*), it becomes feminine such as in the statement of Allah: 'Say [O, Prophet]: "This is my way, resting upon conscious insight accessible to reason ..."' (*Yusuf*: 108). This is pointing out that those who purchase misguidance for the purpose of misleading people do not simply content themselves with that. Absolutely not, they stoop even lower and begin to ridicule the righteous. They make a practice out of mocking the people of the straight path and then have the utter audacity to consider those upon it as unintelligent.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us the end of all this: '...for such there is shameful suffering in store.' (*Luqman*: 6) The people of misguidance are those who have been addressed by this verse, and the description of the punishment as 'shameful' here indicates that punishment is not necessarily shameful; in other words, there is a type of punishment which is not shameful. In fact, some punishment may even be thought of as honour to the one upon whom it falls. Take for instance a man who chastises his son in order to teach him; he is not disciplining him in order to inflict pain or cause him shame; the reverse is quite true, he only hopes that his son will not commit the same mistake again. In this respect, a poet has said: Displaying harshness for the sake of rectifying is a sign of a judicious leader. At times, he even behaves harshly towards the one with whom he normally is compassionate.

Indeed, there are some forms of chastisement which are reminders and some forms which are purification, while there are some forms which indicate the high future expectations that are held for the one being punished. This type of punishment is referred to as a penalty. In fact, it has so little in common with punishment—as people generally conceive of it—that they can scarcely be referred to with the same name.

In this respect, Az-Zamakhshari⁽¹⁾ said, to imagine a scenario in which there is a king and his servant. The servant does something wrong to his

(1) *He is Jarallah Abu Al-Qasim Mahmud ibn 'Umar Az-Zamakhshari (d. 538 A.H.), the author of Tafsir Al-kashhaf 'an Haqa'iq ghawamid At-Tanzil wa 'iyyun Al-Aqawil Fi Wujuh At-Ta'wil, one of the works of Quranic exegesis that was authored by a person of the Mu'atazilite rite; by Mu'atazilite we are referring to those held the famous stance of 'the space in between the two spaces' in reference to those who commit major sins: They did not consider such persons believers nor disbelievers. They also held the position that=*

master. In turn, the king commands that the servant be arrested and punished for his misdeeds. As commanded, the forces responsible for keeping order seize the servant and punish him, but they refrain from doing so severely, for they are aware that he will be reinstated into the service of his master. In this scenario, the punishment inflicted on the servant is strictly in accordance with the misdeeds that he committed; it is not intended to be shameful for him. Conversely, if it were said, 'Take this servant and remove him from service or dismiss him', it would imply that he would never be returning. This would obviously cause humiliation and pain for him.

In this way, what we refer to as punishment in a generic sense can actually serve as a means of honouring (by rectifying) and purifying someone for whom you have great concern. On the other hand, a humiliating and shameful punishment is only directed towards he whom you entertain no hope of his being rectified or returning on the course of right action. To be succinct, the presence of the shameful or humiliating within a form of punishment is an indication that its effects are intended to last eternally.

Next, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَإِذَا نُتِلَّى عَلَيْهِ ءَايَاتُنَا وَلَّى مُسْتَكْبِرًا كَأَن لَّمْ يَسْمَعْهَا
كَأَن فِي أُذُنَيْهِ وَقْرًا فَبَشَّرَهُ بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ

**When Our verses are recited to him, he turns away
disdainfully as if he had not heard them, as if there were
heaviness in his ears. Tell him that there will be a painful
torment! [7] (The Quran, *Luqman*: 7)**

'For whenever our messages are conveyed to such a one, he turns away in his arrogance...' Allah *Glorified is He* is mentioning this after stating: 'But amongst men there is many a one that prefers a mere play with words [to Divine Guidance], so as to lead [those] without knowledge astray from the Path of Allah...' (*Luqman*: 6). All in all, we emerge with a clear picture of the

= is was something tantamount to a duty for Allah to admit believers into Paradise and disbelievers into the fire of Hell. They also gained notoriety for nullifying the attributes of Allah. These represent the major issues in which they differed with Ahl As-Sunna.

Prophet's enthusiasm in conveying the message with which he had been sent; even amongst those whom he knew that they were misguided or, perhaps even more, sought to misguide others.

Turning to the word *walla* (he turns away), we can approximate its meaning as one who insolently turned his back. In Arabic, the expression is originally 'he turned his shoulders'. The tone of the entire statement is consistent with the way we would say, 'He arrogantly turned his back.' The portion of the verse which reads: '...he turns away in his arrogance...' (*Luqman*: 7), creates the effect of someone flagrantly rejecting that which he is being called to. So you (the individual being addressed in the verse) are being called unto the truth, and you swell with pride. If the source of your pride is something intrinsic to your own being, why did you need to resort to purchasing falsehood? How can you be too full of pride to accept the truth while you are in need of falsehood?

How can you behave so arrogantly while you do not even possess the means of substantiating your arrogance? It is acknowledged that the type of arrogance which prevents one from accepting something is usually an outcome of the fact that he is already in possession of something superior to that which is being offered. How can you arrogantly reject, then, the guidance that you are being offered while you do not even possess something inferior to it and not to mention something superior to it?

In essence, arrogance is misdirected. The arrogant individual is in a state of heedlessness of his Lord. Indeed, when he is sizing himself up, he is comparing himself to other people. If this forms the basis of his comparison, he might be driven to arrogance because he has more of the things which enhance life than do other people. His fallacy is being heedless of Allah: If the Magnificence of Allah and His (well-deserved) Pride are brought into the picture, the same individual would feel ashamed to behave arrogantly. Pride is one of the great attributes of majesty which is unsuitable to characterise anyone besides Allah. If truth be told, the Pride of Allah contains honour for us; it protects us from ever becoming slaves to other than Allah.

This would explain the popular adage, 'The one who has no master should take someone as a master.' How exactly this conveys the following point: if I

am in the companionship of someone of great strength, people will fear me, and I will have thus gained protection through my association. This can also be applied to the affair of a sincere believer: He gains protection through the Pride of his Lord. Indeed, Allah is Exalted above all creation. As such, all people are equal in His regard; there is no one who is capable of proudly raising his head before the True Lord.

This establishes a general principle: The Pride of Allah *Glorified is He* is for our benefit.

The arrogant individual that we have been discussing in the context of the verse under discussion has unjustifiably deemed himself above listening to Allah's sayings: '...as though there were deafness in his ears ...' (*Luqman*: 7). This is saying that he fails to pay heed to the Quran as though he were afflicted with deafness or some other condition that would prevent him from hearing: '...Give him, then, the tiding of grievous suffering [in the life to come].' According to what we know, tidings are only given concerning things which promise future good. When you assure your child of success before the test results are released, you are giving him a tiding.

As for giving a 'tiding' that assures an impending doom, it is being employed in the verse's scenario by way of mockery and derision. In context, it is similar to how you would say to a negligent student: I would like to give you the good news of your failure this year. By beginning with, 'I would like to give you the good news', it is almost as if you are surprising him and quickly taking him from elation to dejection when you conclude, 'of your failure this year'. This is perhaps intended to be injurious to his feelings; however, it is an instance of injuring feelings for the purpose of preventing the injury that comes from Divine Punishment. So, returning to the analogy of the negligent student that we mentioned earlier, when you say to him, 'I would like to give you the good news', naturally he expects to hear something pleasing and will probably assume that he has passed. Yet, when you proceed to tell him what actually happened, the pain sets in. A poet has expressed what this emotional blow feels like in his words:

It is like when the clouds gather during a day of intense thirst, but when the people recognise them, they disperse and clear skies appear.

Another poet has offered the following verse:

What I got from Laila that morning was like someone trying to grasp water but being betrayed by the spaces between his fingers.

This explains why they say that there is nothing harder on the soul than an auspicious beginning that leads to a painful ending. To illustrate this, previously, we gave the analogy of a prisoner who, in his need for water, is in dire straits. In this extreme fit of thirst, he asks a prison guard to bring him a cup of water. His spirits begin to rise and he looks forward to quenching his thirst, for indeed, he regards the guard as a sensible, good-natured fellow. After the guard brings the cup, he gives it to the prisoner who promptly raises it to his mouth to take that much sought after drink, and then the guard abruptly hits his hand, spilling the water all over the floor.

There can be no doubt that this would be more painful and harder on the prisoner. If the guard would have simply denied his request to bring him a cup of water from the very beginning, it would have been less painful. This entire process is referred to as 'despair after hope'. He starts with an enticing beginning but ends with a painful ending. We certainly seek refuge with Allah from being constrained after having been at ease.

Next, the True Lord *the Most High* mentions the end result of leading others astray from His Path, turning away from His verses and displaying arrogance: '...Give him, then, the tiding of grievous suffering [in the life to come].' (*Luqman*: 7). On one occasion their punishment was described as humiliating and on another it was described as grievous.

Afterward, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتُ النَّعِيمِ ﴿٨﴾

But for those who believe and do righteous deeds, there will be Gardens of bliss [8] (The Quran, *Luqman*: 8)

Those who believe and perform acts of righteousness are being mentioned as the opposite of those who would purchase a 'mere play of words' for the purpose of leading people astray from the Path of Allah. This feature of introducing items and then presenting their opposing elements is one of the

distinct qualities of the Quran. Indeed, mentioning something alongside its opposite helps to clarify its meaning. By this use of contrast, you emerge with a clearer picture about what is actually being represented in the description.

For an example of this method, look at the saying of Allah: 'Behold, [in the life to come] the truly virtuous will indeed be in bliss, whereas, behold, the wicked will indeed be in a blazing fire' (*al-Infitar*: 13-14). This is a good example of gathering opposites; first, Allah will delight a believer with comforts. Next, a believer will be further delighted to find his enemies from amongst disbelievers, those who attempted to persecute, torture and punish him, in the fire of hell.

Earlier, we said that when Allah *the Exalted* speaks about faith, He always links it to doing righteous deeds: '...those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds...' (*Luqman*: 8). Faith is the belief in things which are unseen; nonetheless, what is the value of faith if you fail to act according to its demands?

We find the same thing in the chapter of *al-'Asr*: 'Consider the flight of time. Verily, man is bound to lose himself unless he be of those who attain to faith, and do good works ...' (*al-'Asr*: 1-3). This clearly indicates that the value of having faith is acting according to its demands. If not, what then, can possibly be the use of just believing in a lot of things but failing to give any meaningful expression to what you believe? For this reason, if you have made yourself content with the type of faith that is simply a word that is mentioned but goes unaccompanied by action, you have, in actual effect, made faith evidence against you, not for you.

As for the meaning of the following, '...and do righteous deeds ...', we find that it refers to good deeds. In fact, the True Lord *the Most High* created the entire universe in a state of uprightness. When you encounter something upright within creation, your task is increasing it in the qualities that make it upright. If you are incapable of this enhancement, or at least keep its uprightness, then leave it alone and do not corrupt it.

Furthermore, Allah mentions the reward of faith and the performance of righteous deeds: '...gardens of bliss'. According to the verse, they are gardens—not a single garden—that they will receive in exchange for their faith and righteous deeds. Additionally, these gardens that have been designated

for their comfort have been described as blissful. This description implies that none of what they offer will pass you by, nor will you pass them by.

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَعَدَ اللَّهُ حَقًّا وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٩﴾

Where they will stay: that is God's true promise, and He is the Almighty, the All-Wise [9] (The Quran, *Luqman*: 9)

When reflecting upon these verses, we are given a glimpse of the Mercy of Allah when dealing with His servants—even a disbeliever who is not just simply misguided but also exerting a corruptive influence on others. In spite of this, Allah's Mercy extends to him; He even does so when dealing with their punishment. Have you not observed that, although Allah referred to their punishment as *muhin* (shameful) and *alim* (grievous), He has not mentioned eternity in connection with their punishments in the way that He has mentioned it in connection with the comforts of paradise? Another aspect of Allah's Mercy becomes apparent as we observe that the punishment has been described as singular, while paradise, on the other hand, has been described as consisting of gardens, which indicates plurality. Then, Allah informs us that this represents: '...Allah's true promise ...'

A promise is given for good fortune that will reach you in the future. Here, we would like to point out that a human being can make a promise and actually be preparing to fulfil it, but still fail to do because he does not have the final say about all the factors that determine whether or not he can fulfil the promise. Alternatively, if a promise is given by Allah, its fulfilment is guaranteed. Indeed, unlike a human being, all of the factors involved in fulfilling the promise are in the hands of Allah: No one can prevent him from bringing about what He wants. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* has no partner; this is even acknowledged by the individual who belittles someone by saying, 'The definitive proof that Allah is One is the fact that He created you! For had there been a co-sharer in His rank and divinity, he would have said, "There is certainly no good reason for You to create the likes of this creation!"'

Accordingly, the True Lord *the Most High* instructs us to conclude all of our promises by stating, 'If Allah so wills'. In this way, we are able to preserve our

integrity before the people in case that we are unable to fulfil the promise. This protects us from people accusing us of being dishonest or untrustworthy. I always have a disclaimer of sorts; I can say: 'I wanted to (fulfil) my promise, but Allah wanted something else.' With this disclaimer, you effectively place the matter outside the realm of human control and inside the domain of the Will of Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He*...

So with the Divine prerogative, Allah is essentially protecting human beings from the tongues of others: Thus, if you charge me with some responsibility, and I am unable to fulfil it, you can be assured that matter might have been decreed by Allah. Yet, its time has not come. You must acquaint yourself with the fact that a matter does not take place on the earth until it has first been decreed in the heavens. Do not direct your anger at people nor hold it (the failure to fulfil commitments despite after diligence and effort) against them. Actions do not take place according to the will of humans; on the contrary, all things occur according to the Will of Allah.

In light of this, when you strive to aid your brother in Islam and one of his needs winds up being fulfilled as a direct result of your involvement, you, as a true believer in the role of Allah's Divine Predestination (*Al-qadr*), should display good manners with Him by reminding your brother: Your need was fulfilled with me not because of me! That is to say that it was Allah's Will to fulfil your need, and thus He made me able to do it. In the same sense, a physician who is a true believer should always say, 'The cure is given to me. It does not come from me.'

If people truly understood this issue of Divine Predestination, it would help them to relax. When you see an earnest, hard-working individual demoted and devalued, while a hypocritical sycophant is gaining access to the halls of power and ascending the ranks, do not get upset. Even if you do not have respect for the individual on account of his character, you must respect the fact that it is Allah's Will that he occupies that position.

The affairs that take place within the creation of Allah do not happen in a mechanistic way. Quite the reverse is true, for at every stage the predestination of Allah is effective; Allah raises whomever He wants and debases whomever He wants. Indeed, all of His actions are defined by an overriding wisdom;

every single issue is for a purpose. If this were not so, we would be forced to adopt the position of philosophers who proclaimed that Allah has created the universal issues and then left them to people to manipulate and control!

Allah *the Almighty* has never left these issues. This is evidenced by the saying of Allah: 'Allah's alone in the dominion over the heavens and earth. He creates whatever He wills. He bestows the gift of female offspring on whomever He wills the gift of male offspring on whomever He wills, or He gives both male and female [to whomever He wills] and causes to be barren whomever He wills...[50]' (*ash-Shura*: 49-50).

After considering this verse, it is not correct for anyone to say, 'Why could so-and-so not father a child, or why could so-and-so not conceive a child?' Indeed, these cases are determined by the Will of Allah. If an individual who is prevented from producing children were to respect the predestination of Allah, in that being decreed his lot, Allah would make all the children such that an individual sees as if they were his own. As long as Allah says '...He bestows...' you, it indicates that in any case your situation was given to you by Him. No one has any say whatsoever concerning males, females, sterility, infertility, etc. Therefore, how can you accept the bestowal of Allah if you are given males, but you fail to accept it if you are given females or are even infertile?

We have already discussed the practice of burying female offspring that was prevalent in the Arabian Peninsula before Islam. Indeed, a female child would not grow up to ride horses, carry weapons, defend her family, etc. With the dawn of Islam, this practice was effectively stopped, and women were accorded a position of respect. Nevertheless, despite the fact that Islam raised the status of women, there still remains a popular tendency to regard the birth of male children as more of a cause for celebration than the birth of female children.

At present, there is a conflict raging among those who purport to represent the interest of men and those who claim to do so for women. In truth, Islam has nothing to do with this conflict. In Islam the relationship of men and women is not adversarial, but complementary. It is very strange to see some women display reverse-sexism towards men but yet act completely hysterical if they fail to give birth to a male child! Despite the nature of their protest, this seems to be proof that they regard males as superior to females.

It is as if Allah *the Exalted* is teaching us that he who respects the predestination of Him in respect to giving birth to girls, He offers him, 'You have shown due respect for my predestination, so I will grant you all that I have predestined.' Subsequently, he is blessed with the birth of sons, or Allah bestows his daughters husbands who become even more dutiful and obedient to him than his own children.

Additionally, did you not observe that Allah actually mentioned female children before mentioning male children (when speaking of His bestowal); He says: '...He bestows the gift of female offspring on whomever He wills, the gift of male offspring on whomever He wills...' (*ash-Shura*: 49). Why is this? The reason is that Allah knows the love that the people have for male children: 'for whenever any of them is given the glad tiding of [the birth of] a girl, his face darkens, and he is filled with suppressed anger, avoiding all people because of the [alleged] evil of the glad tiding which he has received' (*an-Nahl*: 58-59).

As for the saying of Allah, '...for He alone is Almighty, truly Wise.' (*Luqman*: 9), Allah's Might implies that He cannot be overtaken nor does He consult anyone before He acts. The second part of the statement which makes reference to Allah's Wisdom indicates that He knows what He is promising very well, and He knows that He can fulfil the promise that He has made.

Next, the verses within Allah's Book turn towards one of the evidences which substantiate man's natural inclination toward faith in the existence of Allah:

خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ بِغَيْرِ عَمَدٍ تَرَوْنَهَا وَأَلْقَىٰ فِي الْأَرْضِ رَوَاسِيَ أَن تَمِيدَ بِكُمْ وَبَثَّ
فِيهَا مِن كُلِّ دَابَّةٍ وَأَنزَلْنَا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَنبَتْنَا فِيهَا مِن كُلِّ زَوْجٍ كَرِيمٍ ﴿١٠﴾

He created the heavens without any visible support, and He placed firm mountains on the earth — in case it should shake under you — and He spread all kinds of animals around it. We sent down water from the sky, with which We made every kind of good plant grow on earth [10] (The Quran, *Luqman*: 10)

First, the True Lord *the Most High* mentions a sign that exists with creation, a sign that not a single disbeliever or even an atheist would dare lay claim to.

Indeed, this is a sign which is clearly visible and observable. When Allah clearly states, 'I am the Creator of the heavens and earth', no one objected to this assertion. By that, we are referring to someone who will come and lay a counter claim to Allah's by saying, 'No, on the contrary, I am the creator of the heavens and earth.'

Previously, we mentioned that any case that only has one claimant must be submitted to that claimant on account of the fact that there is no one raising a counter claim. Proceeding on the basis of this sound logical principle, the True Lord, Allah is undoubtedly the Creator (of the heavens and the earth), and there is nothing else that needs to be said about this issue. If there is another creator besides Him, then where is he? Is he aware that someone else has 'taken' the creation from him? What is preventing him from speaking on his own behalf and upholding his right (to be recognised as the Creator)? Or is he unaware of that? If he does not possess any of the aforementioned knowledge, how can he legitimately be considered an 'Allah'? Likewise, he is asleep or unaware of the affairs of His creation. In either scenario, such an entity is not suitable to be deemed Allah.

This explains why Allah has mentioned: 'Allah [Himself] proffers evidence ...that there is no deity save Him ...' (*Al-Imran*: 18). This is an instance in which Allah is testifying to the singularity of His own essence. Again, in the light of the fact that no one has come forward to raise an objection, He must be considered true to His claim until someone comes along and claims otherwise.

Earlier in this work, we attempted to give an analogy to elucidate the point we are discussing, and always, even the noblest analogy does not approach Allah's unreachable Glory. We mentioned a group of some sort that gathers in the home of one of its members. When the meeting ends and the people have dispersed, the owner of the house finds a billfold full of money that he cannot link to any specific member of the group. Subsequently, he calls the people who attended the meeting at his house and asks them about it one by one, but none of them claims the wallet. At last one of them knocks on the door and says, 'By Allah, I seemed to have forgotten my wallet here.' At this point, there can be no doubt that the wallet belongs to him and that he is its actual owner: To be sure, no one else came forward to claim the wallet.

Establishing this principle, the True Lord *the Most High* says: 'Say: "If there were—as some people assert—[other] deities side by side with Him, surely [even] they would have to strive to find a way unto Him Who is enthroned on His Almightyness.'" (*al-Isra'*: 42) This is asserting that they would have gone to seek out the One Who had taken the creation and humanity from their charge, the One Who had taken the right to be worshipped as Allah from them.

If they offer that it is true that above us is the High Allah, nonetheless, we are still demigods. Allah *the Almighty* rebuts this fatuous claim by stating: 'I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor of the creation of their own selves, and neither do I [have any need to] take as My helpers those [beings] that lead [men] astray.' (*al-Kahf*: 51)

Turning our attention to the portion of Allah's statement which reads as follows, '...without any supports you can see...' (*Luqman*: 10), we find that indeed, if you explored every angle of the earth, from north to south and east to west, you would find the canopy of the sky covering you at every point. Yet, despite the expansiveness of the sky, you do not find any supports or pillars holding it up. The wording that appears in the verse, '...you can see...', can support two meanings: either the sky does not have any supports (as we can see) or it does have supports, but its supports are imperceptible to us. The meaning of '...without any supports you can see ...' is that we do not see the supports. In accordance with the second meaning, the sky does actually have supports. However, we are unable to perceive them or take measure of them.

If you were to pose the following question: What are these supports that we are unable to perceive? Some would indicate gravity (as the invisible support being referred to within the verse). This is not right; the True Lord has ended this issue by saying: '...and [it is He Who] holds the celestial bodies, [in their orbits], so that they may not fall upon the earth otherwise than by His leave ...' (*al-Hajj*: 65).

In the light of this, the only sensible thing left for us to do is to state that the firmament is being upheld by the Power of Allah. Nonetheless, in order that we do not spend time debating about how Allah performs this task, He has given us a living example of the same phenomenon which is the bird as it glides through the sky, Allah *the Exalted* is upholding it: 'Have, then, they [who

deny the truth] never considered the birds, enabled [by Allah] to fly in mid-air, with none but Allah holding them aloft ...' (*al-An'am*: 79).

In a separate place, the True Lord mentions the following: 'Verily, it is Allah [alone] Who upholds the celestial bodies and the earth, lest they deviate...' (*Fatir*: 41). This makes it sufficiently clear that Allah *the Almighty* is upholding them according to law; yet, it is a law that we are unable to perceive.

Linguistically, (*As-sama'*) the sky refers to everything that covers you from above. The clouds are included within this definition despite the fact that they seem closer than the sky when you observe them. To be sure, Allah mentioned the word *As-sama'* in the verse: '...And we send down water from the skies ...' (*Luqman*: 10). In a literal sense, water descends from the clouds not from the skies which tower above them. The major difference between the two is that clouds seem restricted to certain places, which means that you see them in some places and notice their absence in others; the sky, on the other hand, represents one consistent mass without a single break or fissure anywhere. When the True Lord *the Most High* speaks of the earth and the skies, He explicitly says that the skies are seven in number, yet He never explicitly says that the 'earths' are also seven in number. Rather, He says: '... and like them, of the earth ...' (*at-Talaq*: 12).

This indicates that the earth and skies are of like number. If the sky, then, is everything which covers you from above, the earth must be regarded as everything that is situated below you. Then again, the question persists: Where are these seven earths?

To be certain, the Quran has alluded to the fact that the skies are seven in number. Additionally, it has informed us that the Prophet passed through all of them during the Ascension (*Al-mi'raj*). In fact, upon returning, the Prophet could readily inform people of what each sky contained. As long as the sky is considered all that covers creation (in any particular realm) from above and earth is considered all that is situated below them; all of creation in the first sky regards the second sky as that which covers them from above, while they regard the first sky (our sky) as being below them or equivalent to their ground: This relationship continues as you move through the seven skies.

Next, Allah says: '... and has placed firm mountains upon the earth...' (*Luqman*: 10). This is a reference to firm mountain ranges that are deeply embedded beneath the earth's surface; they are rooted deeply enough to stabilise the earth. As a matter of fact, the purpose of the creation of mountains was clearly expressed in the verse: '...lest it sway with you...' (*Luqman*: 10); what this means is lest it tilts and trembles while you are upon it. Nevertheless, if the earth were actually stable, as it does seem to have been created, why would it need something to stabilise it?

Accordingly, this verse stated that the earth is moving and that the mountains were created to stabilise and regulate its movement. This verse also indicated the concept of the earth's rotation. We can find the same concept asserted in another verse in which Allah says: 'And you see the mountains, assuming them to be firm, when they are travelling as clouds passing away' (*an-Naml*: 88).

This establishes the concept that the mountains have a movement that is inextricably linked to the earth's movement. Nevertheless, a person may be tempted to ask, 'Why do we not perceive the movement of mountains?' The answer is that an observer moving at a certain speed amongst his immediate surroundings will be unable to discern the speed of the surroundings.

For instance, if a mosque we are sitting inside was built on a slowly rotating platform, we would not be able to sense its constant subtle rotation as we are sitting inside. This is because the objects inside the mosque are stable and unchanging as we have the same spatial formations relative to each other. Hence, we will not be able to sense the rotation of the entire mosque unless we open a window and notice the scenery outside it shifting with its rotation.

Accordingly, it is not possible for people dwelling upon the earth to feel its movement since they are moving at the same speed with it. Since the mountains are described in one verse as pegs or dowels embedded in the earth and are then described in another verse as cloud-like travellers, these verses are an indication to the earth's movement

Allah *Glorified is He* compared the movement of the mountains to the movement of the clouds. We know that clouds do not move on their own, but their movement is the result of moving winds. Similarly, we can conclude that

mountains are not moving on their own, but their movement is an extension of the earth's movement.

Then, Allah *the Exalted* mentioned another reason for the creation of mountains: '...and has caused all manners of living beings to multiply thereon.' (*Luqman*: 10) We have previously mentioned that mountains are abundant storehouses of Divine provisions that nourish living beings. We highlighted that the top layers of mountainous soil is continuously eroding due to prolonged exposure to climate changes. Rainwater descending upon this soil carries debris into river valleys. This increases the fertility of riverbanks, year after year. Furthermore, water flows down the mountains to form rivulets and river basins that are potential sources of water during times of need.

Allah's Divine Wisdom ordained that mountains become firm and unyielding. If mountains were not such solid, persistent structures, they would gradually become eroded by rainwater and climate changes over the years. If this had occurred, river valleys would be deprived from the benefit of organic silt that annually descends from mountaintops. This explains Allah's Words: '...and nothing do We bestow except in accordance with a measure well-defined' (*al-Hijr*: 21). Therefore, fertile lands increase due to these annual mountainous silt deposits.

In elucidating this point, it would serve us to look at Allah's saying: 'Say, "Would you indeed deny Him Who has created the earth in two periods? And do you claim that there is any power that could rival Him, the Lord of all the worlds?" For He (it is who) placed firm mountains on it (the earth) (towering) above its surface, and bestowed (so many) blessings on it, and equitably apportioned its means of subsistence' (*Fussilat*: 9-10). Allah *Glorified is He* has made the mountains anchored so that the earth does not convulse and shake while we are residing on it. Additionally, He made them solid since they are abundant storehouses that play a pivotal role in providing vegetation that nourishes our existence.

Another expression of the immeasurable Mercy of Allah upon human beings is that He has placed nutrient stores inside our bodies, which can sustain our survival in times of need. If a human being is prohibited from food and drink, he will begin to derive nutrition from his own body's stores. First,

the body will utilise fatty tissue. Then, it will take nutrition from flesh and bones. Thus, even bones can serve as a source of sustenance for a starving body. Indeed, this understanding helps us to comprehend the statement of Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* when he said, 'Feeble have my bones become' (*Maryam*: 4). This indicates that he had reached a terminal stage in his life's nourishment.

This fact leads us to observe another form of Allah's Mercy upon His creation. If food a body eats surpasses its daily requirements of satiety, strength, and energy, this excess sustenance is not completely discarded. Indeed, it can still be utilised to build stores of nutrition to prepare for events of deprivation. Hence, Allah *the Almighty* has given human beings the ability to survive without food for more than a month. As for water, one can survive without it for a period ranging from three to ten days. This period depends upon other factors, such as the amount of food and water stored in the body at the beginning of its starvation.

Conversely, people can only survive without air for a very short amount of time. Nonetheless, even this reveals Divine Mercy and Wisdom within creation as Allah *the Exalted* has not allowed air to be owned by anyone! If your enemy owned your air, you would most likely die before your enemy's pleasure!

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and has caused all manners of living beings to multiply thereon.' (*Luqman*: 10) The Arabic verb *bath-tha* means to spread something or allow it to multiply or propagate. The word *daaba* (all forms of living beings) corresponds with the Arabic word *dabeeb* which refers to the sonorous crawling or stepping of living beings when they move upon the ground. In a generic sense, every created being that uses the ground to get from one place to another can be said to crawl. This means that every living thing has a way of transporting itself. We can hear the movement or 'crawling' of larger animals, while we lack the ability to hear the crawling of smaller creatures, like ants, for example. Thus, even though ants do make sounds as they step upon the ground, these sounds need a higher and more intensive form of listening.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...all manners of living beings' (*Luqman*: 10). Therefore, this statement encompassed all created beings that move and step

about. In other words, it includes everything that could legitimately be called an animate living being, ranging from the microscopic creatures to the largest animals roaming the planet.

Allah *the Almighty* has made it permissible to eat some of the created beings mentioned in this verse. He also made other creatures impermissible to consume. This has led some people to question the purpose for which these animals were created. Along similar lines, they also enquired if every animal that has been created can be eaten. Of course, some of these animals, created by Allah *Glorified is He* cannot be eaten by human beings as these creatures have been made to serve other purposes.

If you consider this concept comprehensively, you will find that the things which you have been prohibited from consuming may serve you in other ways. Some of these prohibited animals are actually preys of the animals you are allowed to consume. Furthermore, you may derive from these animals benefits other than food.

For example, a snake is considered a purely harmful creature by most people. However, snake venom can be used in several areas in medicine. In addition, their skins can provide other forms of benefit. Therefore, although we do not eat snakes, we can still benefit from them in other ways.

Interestingly enough, some people asked similar questions regarding the consumption of pork. They asked, 'If Allah has made pork impermissible to eat, why did He create pigs?' Glory be to Allah (*Subhan-Allah*)! Do these people think that Allah *Glorified is He* has created everything for the purpose of being eaten by human beings? There is no need for you to eat everything as indeed, Allah *the Almighty* has already made other foods that are appropriate for your consumption.

Do you, for instance, eat petroleum products? Even automobiles, trains, and planes are fed with distinct forms of fuel. Likewise, everything has a source of fuel that is appropriate for its use. Your Lord has granted your appropriate sustenance just as He has given every other form of creation its appropriate form of livelihood.

A forest that has been left undisturbed by human interference will be filled with a wide range of living plant and animal species. Its ecosystem will

be balanced and devoid of aberration and putridity since these wild creatures maintain an environmental equilibrium amongst themselves. The weaker beings provide food for the stronger animals and the excrement of some creatures will sustain the life of others. This is a system that functions on the basis of natural and pure instinct as opposed to human motivation or prejudice.

Interestingly enough, every natural system, which human beings are prohibited from changing, flows according to the most detailed and precise laws. Indeed, natural systems do not demonstrate massive corruption until human interference occurs. If you would like to observe this for yourself, pay a visit to any of the gardens or recreational grounds after a celebration. Take *Sham Al-Naseem* celebration, for example. Such disturbing scenes may give you a basic concept of the wide destruction that human interference can leave behind. Why are we linking human interference with corruption? The primary reason is that human beings handle natural systems without applying the laws of the Creator to their interferences. On the other hand, obeying the commandments of the Creator will not cause corruption in the natural order of the environment.

We previously pointed out that human beings do not have autonomous power over anything in existence, except that which Allah *Glorified is He* has subjugated and subjected to their use. For instance, a little boy may have the ability to ride an elephant or guide a camel to his destination, while burdening these beasts with heavy weighted objects. On the other hand, almost all people will not possess the same powers over smaller creatures, such as snakes, or even the smallest insects such as ticks! This is due to the fact that Allah *the Exalted* has subjected certain beings to our use as opposed to others.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* concluded the verse we are studying by stating: 'And We send down water from skies, and thus We cause every noble kind [of life] (*zawj-in kareem*) to grow on the earth.' (*Luqman*: 10) The phrase: 'from skies' means that Allah *the Almighty* sent this water from the direction of the skies. We know that rain does not descend from the heavens, but it actually descends from the clouds.

The word *zawj* (each member of a pair) refers to the living pairs of plants. Some people wrongly consider the word *zawj* to refer to both members of a pair when the word actually refers to each singular member of the pair by

itself. For instance, in the Arabic language, we refer to the husband alone as a *zawj* and to the wife alone as a *zawj*. Allah *Glorified is He* also described the propagation of populations upon the earth in the following Words: 'And in everything We have created two counterparts (*zawj-ayn*)' (*adh-Dhariyat*: 49). Since the male and the female are included within this designation, each of them is referred to using the term *zawj*.

The Arabic word *taw'am* (twin) is similar to the word *zawj* in this regard. It also refers to one sibling of any two siblings born together. Some people use the Arabic word *taw'am* when referring to both individuals together, but this is incorrect. You must use the word *taw'am-an* (two twins) if you are referring to both of them.

Allah *the Exalted* described the vegetative growth which is cultivated from rainwater, as coming from a generous pair. The word *kareem* (generous) is used because vegetation propagates abundantly and liberally. Indeed, a single seed can produce up to seven-hundred seeds! If this is the generosity of Allah's creation, how can we describe the generosity of the Creator Himself *Glorified is He*?!

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

هَذَا خَلْقُ اللَّهِ فَأَرُونِي مَاذَا خَلَقَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ دُونِهِ
بَلِ الظَّالِمُونَ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿١١﴾

**All this is God's creation. Now, show Me what
your other gods have created. No, the disbelievers
are clearly astray [11] (The Quran, *Luqman*: 11)**

This verse is addressed to the people of arrogance and obstinacy who rejected the verses of Allah *the Almighty*. In the beginning of the verse, the Words, '[All] of this...' (*Luqman*: 11) are a reference to the many parts of Allah's creation that were mentioned before this verse. These included the heavens which were created without visible supports, the mountains which stabilised the earth, the created beings living in our midst and the rainwater that descends from the sky to give life to vegetation. All of these beings are examples of Allah's creation, and no one else would ever claim responsibility

for them because Allah *the Exalted* originated them with no partners. In the next part of the verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Show me, then, what others [than He] may have created' (*Luqman*: 11). This verse challenged the polytheists to give an example of what their idols had created.

They did not have an answer to this question because, even in their overweening arrogance, they had no material proof to establish their responses or replies. Indeed, the truth was clear, and their falsehood was jumbled and confused. None of them was bold enough to proclaim that their deities created the mountains, the sun, or the moon. Despite their repulsive disbelief and obstinacy, they could not find any answers to this Quranic challenge. Allah *the Almighty* made it clear that the issue did not stop at their inability to originate creation. These disbelievers did not know how they, themselves, were created. Allah says: 'I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor of the creation of their own selves, and neither do I (have any need to) take those who were leading (men) astray as My helpers' (*al-Kahf*: 51). Allah *Glorified is He* also says: '...and neither do I (have any need to) take as My helpers those (beings) who lead (men) astray' (*al-Kahf*: 51). This is evidence of the truthfulness and miraculous nature of the Quran as Allah *Glorified is He* informed us that there would be entities who would lead people astray regarding the issue of creation. They would turn women and men away from the truth by using false speech.

Indeed, we have heard those who deceived people by offering speculations regarding the origin of the earth or claiming that human beings were the offspring of apes, as well as other misguided concepts. Their false, ungrounded speculations regarding creation have made the truth of this verse apparent. Indeed, long before these theories were presented, the Quran has informed us about such people, who did, someday, lead men and women astray by claiming wrong concepts regarding their creation.

In a sense, every explanation of creation is misguided if it opposes the statement: '[All] of this is the creation of Allah.' (*Luqman*: 11) Even in offering their misguidance, such people are unaware that they are unintentionally confirming the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and neither do I (have any need to) take as my helpers those (beings) who lead (mankind) astray,' (*al-Kahf*: 51).

We notice the same principle regarding the tradition of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Some people only want to resort to the Quranic text, while constantly attempting to discredit the authority of Prophet Muhammad's Hadiths. These people insincerely say, 'The legislation that we have in common (with other Muslims) is the book of Allah *Glorified is He* (the Quran). Whatever it makes permissible, we consider permissible, and whatever it makes impermissible, we consider impermissible amongst us.' Then, these people go on to neglect the prophetic sayings as a source of religious legislation.

Indeed, all Glory belongs to Allah! Their misguided statement actually establishes the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad's Hadiths! Indeed, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* informed us about them when he said, 'There will be (a time) when a man, who will speak about my traditions nonchalantly as he is reclining on his couch, and will say, "The thing we can follow is the Book of Allah. Whatever it says is permissible, we make permissible amongst ourselves, and whatever it says is impermissible, we make impermissible."' ⁽¹⁾ Indeed, we have seen these people in our times who reject prophetic Hadiths while claiming to accept the Quran alone.

The meaning of Allah's Words, '[All] of this is the creation of Allah' (*Luqman*: 11) refers to Allah's created beings. The portion of the verse which says, '...Show Me, then, what others (than He) may have created!' (*Luqman*: 11) did not challenge them to create anything as impressive as the heavens, mountains or rain falling from the clouds to give life to vegetation. On the contrary, this verse only challenged them to create the smallest and most insignificant creatures they can find. Generally speaking, there are rarely any visible creatures that are more visibly insignificant than a fly. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Behold, as the (idols and) false deities whom you invoke instead of Allah cannot create (as much as) a fly, even were they to join all their forces to that end' (*al-Hajj*: 73). However, the parable did not stop at this point. Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'And if flies grasp anything from them

(1) This Prophetic saying was narrated by Imam Ahmad in his *Musnad* (4/132), *At-Tirmidhi* in his *Sunnan* (2664) and *Ibn Majah* (12) and *Al-Daraqutni* (4/287) respectively, in their *Sunnan*. This Hadith was narrated on the authority of *Al-Miqdam ibn Ma'adikarib* Allah be pleased with him.

[the idols], they will not retrieve it [from the flies]! Weak indeed is the seeker, and [weak] is the deity that is sought,' (*al-Hajj*: 73).

Allah *Glorified is He* then concluded the verse by stating: 'Nay, but the transgressing people are in clear misguidance' (*Luqman*: 11). This indicates that they are completely engulfed in misguidance. Once misguidance completely envelops someone, the prospect of guidance reaching them is diminished. It is as if this statement is telling Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'these are people who will never be guided, O, Muhammad. The only thing you must do is persevere in your conveyance of the message, until Allah *Glorified is He* grants you people who will be better than them in receiving your message. In due time, you will be surrounded by an army of believers who will be better at aiding you in your mission.' Indeed, that is exactly the way it happened!

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَا لُقْمَانَ الْحِكْمَةَ أَنِ اشْكُرْ لِلَّهِ وَمَن يَشْكُرْ
فَإِنَّمَا يَشْكُرُ لِنَفْسِهِ ۖ وَمَن كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَنِيٌّ حَمِيدٌ ﴿١٢﴾

We endowed Luqman with wisdom: 'Be thankful to God: whoever gives thanks benefits his own soul, and as for those who are thankless — God is self-sufficient, worthy of all praise' [12] (The Quran, *Luqman*: 12)

Allah *Glorified is He* has provided His sustenance for us, even before He created us. Then, after our creation, He blessed us with a clear and natural inclination to worship solely Him. Furthermore, He continued to reveal successive Divine Messages to mankind. Each of these messages introduced detailed commandments that were suitable to the social environment and age intended for their Message.

Before Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* undertook the burden of being Allah's vicegerent on the earth, Allah *Glorified is He* subjected him to a test. This objective of the test was to teach him faithfulness to His Lord's commandments regarding the performance or avoidance of certain actions. It was meant to teach Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* caution and avoidance of Satan's cunning plots.

Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* went through this demonstrative test before Allah *the Exalted* chose him to be a prophet. Many people wrongly think that Adam's act of disobedience occurred after he was chosen as a prophet. Consequently, we find them asking, 'How could Adam disobey his Lord? Is he not a prophet, and are not prophets Divinely protected from error?' Indeed, Adam did disobey his Lord (regarding the tree). However, he committed this misdeed before he was chosen as a prophet. Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned this incident in the following verse: 'And [thus] did Adam disobey his Lord, and thus, did he fall [into a grievous fault]. Thereafter, [however,] His Lord elected him [for His grace], accepted his repentance, and bestowed His guidance upon him.' (*Ta Ha*: 121-122)

This establishes that Adam became a prophet after the act of disobedience. Nevertheless, one might still be led to ask, 'Why was an act of disobedience committed by Adam, while he was being prepared to become a prophet?' Many scholars have reasoned, 'Indeed, Adam is the father of humanity, and humanity is of two types. Firstly, there are human beings who are divinely protected from error, and these are the Prophets. Secondly, there are human beings who do not enjoy this Divine protection from error, and these are the rest of mankind. Since Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* was the father of both types of human beings, it was necessary for him to represent both types of people. Therefore, he lived a portion of his life as a regular person, and that was the period when he succumbed to disobedience. Thereafter, after he repented to his Lord and was chosen by Him, he lived the following portion of his life as a prophet. In this respect, Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* was able to combine the two different ways of existing in this world.'

Allah *Glorified is He* said in the verse we are studying concerning Luqman *peace be upon him*: 'And, indeed, We *atayna* (granted) wisdom unto Luqman' (*Luqman*: 12). The Arabic term *atayna* (granted) is used in several instances in the Quran to denote the process of Divine Revelation (*alwahy*).

However, there are two types of this revelation (*wahy*). If the term 'granted' *atayna* or *awhayna* is used while referring to a messenger of Allah, it indicates a Divine Revelation in which Allah's Way is being transmitted to that messenger. On the other hand, if it is used in connection with a normal

person, it is referring to the process of inventive inspiration. This is when an idea which was previously unknown, is secretly revealed by Allah *Glorified is He* to His creation.

In this regard, consider the following verse that refers to Allah's Revelation to the angels: 'Lo! Your Lord inspired [*yuhee*] to the angels [to convey this message to the believers]: "I am with you!" [And He commanded the angels:] "And firmly support those who have believed."' (*al-Anfal*: 12)

Allah *the Most High* also granted inspiration to human beings, as we recognise in Allah's Words: 'We inspired (*awhayna*) [thus] to the mother of Musa (Moses), "Nurse him."' (*al-Qasas*: 7). Likewise, He granted inspiration to animals: 'And [consider how] your Lord has inspired (*awha*) to the bees, "Prepare for yourself dwellings in mountains."' (*an-Nahl*: 68)

Allah *Glorified is He* also mentioned that He inspired the righteous supporters of the messengers: 'and [remember the time] when I inspired (*awhaytu*) to the disciples, 'Believe in Me and in My Apostle,' (*al-Ma'ida*: 111).

Conversely, we know that the minions of Satan amongst the jinns also inspire their human counterparts: 'and verily, the devils whisper [within the hearts] (*layuhuna*) to their [human] servants, [instructing them] to argue with you.' (*al-An'am*: 121)

These were all examples of the linguistic forms of the Arabic word *awha* 'revealed'. To summarise its linguistic meanings, the first general definition of the term *wahy* (revelation) refers to the process of inspiration where a fact that was previously unknown is secretly understood by a person or being. Conversely, the second specific definition concerns our religious understanding where the term *wahy* refers to any inspiration that conveyed and revealed a Divine Message from Allah to one of His appointed messengers. Thus, this second definition excludes most of the examples highlighted above.

Allah *Glorified is He* expressed the religious concept of 'granting revelation' in its general sense when He says: 'And it is not given to mortal man that Allah should speak unto him other than through sudden inspiration, or [by a voice, as it were] from behind a veil, or by sending an apostle to reveal, by His leave, whatever He wills [to reveal].' (*ash-Shura*: 51)

Revelation in its religious sense is the disclosure of a Message from the Divine Knowledge of Allah to one of His messengers. Yet, this transmission will not occur unless the human being possesses certain virtuous qualities that are a pre-requisite for a receiver of Divine Inspiration.

As a simple analogy, consider a simple radio set. The radio set must have necessary attributes for it to receive the transmission of certain radio waves. When your radio set suddenly loses this connection, you immediately conclude that there is a problem with your system's antenna or receiver, and not with the radio broadcaster. This is because radio broadcasters function professionally, and their radio waves are mostly transmitted without interruption. Indeed, this is a simple analogy that will never appropriately illustrate the transcendent Glory of Allah's Messages.

Allah *Glorified is He* maintains a consistent line of communication with His servants, but it is only detectable to those who possess the necessary qualities to accept it. As we previously mentioned, the servant's suitability is measured by the extent to which they conform to the Way of Allah *Glorified is He* in performing His Divine Obligations and refraining from His Prohibitions.

If a person has consumed excessive amounts of unlawful means of sustenance and was nourished illegally, he will not be suitable for receiving Allah's revelations. Indeed, his unlawful actions will ruin the natural inclination towards righteousness that Allah *Glorified is He* has placed inside His servants. This inclination was placed at the time that Allah *the Almighty* took the oath from all human beings, as He says in the following verse: 'And when your Lord brought forth their offspring from the loins of the children of Adam, [thus] calling upon them to bear witness about themselves: "Am I not your Lord?"—to which they answered: "Indeed, we do bear witness thereto,"' (*al-A'raf*: 172). If the descendants of Adam had remained in that initial state of purity and adhered to the Way of their Lord concerning His obligations and prohibitions, they would have all been able to receive this inspiration from Allah *the Exalted* without disruption.

Consider the inspiration that was granted by Allah *Glorified is He* to the mother of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: 'Nurse him (for a time), and then, when you have cause to fear for him, cast him into the river and

have no fear and do not grieve.' (*al-Qasas*: 7) What are the qualities present in her heart that allowed her to receive Allah's inspiration with immediate acceptance and satisfaction? How could a mother be convinced that an action of probable death (casting her child into the river) would save her child from possible death [Prophet Musa (Moses) being caught and executed by Pharaoh]?

Indeed, if Allah's Revelation coincides with virtuous qualities that make one suitable to receive it, the soul of the recipient will not hesitate (in implementing the orders of Allah), nor will the soul search for further evidence. Prophet Musa's (Moses') mother applied Allah's Command just as it was given to her. This is the perfect example of Divine Inspiration!

Regarding this, we can also mention the following verse: 'They both found one of Our servants, on whom We had bestowed grace from Ourselves and unto whom We had imparted knowledge (issuing) from Our Knowledge' (*al-Kahf*: 65). This righteous servant ⁽¹⁾ was Al-Khidr, and he was not a prophet. In spite of this, Allah *Glorified is He* gave him direct inspiration, and he was appointed as a teacher for Prophet Musa (Moses), one of Allah's prime prophets. The only thing that earned him such a lofty rank was being a servant to Allah *the Most High* according to the commandments that were introduced by Prophet Musa (Moses) himself. Al-Khidr *peace be upon him* worshipped Allah with utmost sincerity and was, therefore, granted blessings which only Allah *the Almighty* can grant.

Read Allah's verse: 'O, you who have believed! If you remain pious towards Allah, He will bless you with a standard by which to discern the truth

(1) In his interpretation (3/92), Ibn Kathir explained, "This is a reference to Al-Khidr *peace be upon him* as he has been mentioned in many authentic prophetic Hadiths. For instance, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said in a Hadith narrated by Al-Bukhari (3402), Ahmad, At-Tirmidhi (3151) and Ibn Abu Hatim, on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him 'He is referred to as Al-Khidr because when he would sit upon a white piece of fur, it would resonate with a green colour.' This Hadith was cited by As-Suyuti in *Ad-Durr Al-Manthur* (5/420). Ibn Hajar was quoted as saying in his book *Fath Al-Bari* (6/434): 'In his book about history, At-Tabari mentioned that Al-Khidr was alive during the time of Ifridun according to the dominant opinion of Jewish sources. He appeared right before the Great Dh Al-Qarnayn.' An-Naqash made narrations that speak of his immortality. However, according to Ibn 'Atiya, these narrations are inauthentic as there are no means of establishing the truth of their claims.

from the falsehood' (*al-Anfal*: 29). Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Just as for those who are (willing to be) guided, He increases their (ability to follow His) guidance and grants them piousness' (*Muhammad*: 17).

Therefore, if we would like to benefit ourselves with Divine Inspirations from Allah *Glorified is He* we would need to preserve the purity of our physical bodies by using the prescriptions of their Creator. We can do that if we adhere to Allah's Way by following His Commands and avoiding His prohibitions.

Luqman peace be upon him had these pure and genuine qualities of servitude to Allah *the Most High*. He had never allowed his body to consume any unlawful sustenance and was always adherent to the Way of his Lord. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* granted him wisdom and said concerning this: 'And, indeed, we granted wisdom unto *Luqman*,' (*Luqman*: 12).

The scholars differed on whether or not he was a prophet, but the dominant view stated that he was not a prophet.⁽¹⁾ Those who stated that he was a prophet did not have a Hadith that bears a sound chain of narrators upon which they based their opinion.

Thus, the majority of scholars' opinions stated that he was a pious servant who was sharply perceptive and very wise. As we pointed out before, perception and discernment are the foundation upon which information is gathered, and *Luqman peace be upon him* did not allow any concept to pass without contemplating it on the basis of his clear insight and deep perception. Accordingly, he had internalised many subtle realisations and established their truths. Therefore,

(1) *Ibn Abu Hatim narrated on the authority of Qatada Allah be pleased with him that the latter said, 'Allah Glorified is He gave Luqman peace be upon him the choice between wisdom and prophethood, and he chose wisdom. Accordingly, Angel Jibril (Gabriel) peace be upon him came to him while he was asleep and placed wisdom upon him. When Luqman awoke, he found himself speaking with profound wisdom, and it was thus said to him, 'How could you choose wisdom over prophethood, and your Lord gave you the right to choose either of them as you pleased?' He answered, 'If Allah Glorified is He would have sent prophethood unto me, I would have asked Him to aid me in living up to it. If He would have made me a prophet, I would have given all that I have in order to fulfill the responsibility of such a lofty post. However, Allah allowed me to choose, and I feared that I might not be strong enough to endure the hardships of prophethood. As a result, I saw wisdom as a more pleasing choice for me.' This narration is cited by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (6/511) and by Al-Qurtubi in his interpretation (7/5317).*

he was able to possess moral values and a good character, and this had a tremendous bearing on the way that he lived his life. Thereby, Luqman *peace be upon him* benefited himself and had a sound reasoning and judicious articulations that delighted the people around him. This is how Luqman lived his life.⁽¹⁾

The scholars have submitted many works of research in an attempt to uncover the person and ethnicity of Luqman *peace be upon him*. Some of them have arrived at the conclusion that he was dark-skinned and bore a strong resemblance to the people of southern Africa, in terms of his facial features. His skin was deeply pigmented, his heart was radiant, and his soul was pure. Fine wisdom flowed out of his thick lips, rich with subtlety and wise meanings.⁽²⁾

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* spoke truthfully when he said, 'Verily, Allah does not look at your bodies or appearances. Rather, He looks at your hearts.'⁽³⁾ Accordingly, whenever you see someone who is less fortunate than you in terms of their financial status, health, social standing or even appearance, do not be deceived or deluded by these elements.

It is more important to consider the areas in which that person exceeds you. Indeed, as we previously pointed out, the Creator *Glorified is He* has distributed His favours unto His servants upon a basis of perfect equality. This means that

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- (1) *It is related on the authority of Abu Ad-Darda' Allah be pleased with him that he mentioned Luqman, the wise man, and stated, "He was not given that which he was given on account of his family, wealth, lineage or appearance. On the contrary, he was a firm person with strong character. He would observe long periods of silence, while spending significant amounts of time in thought and deep contemplation. He did not sleep during the daytime, and no one saw him spit, clear his throat loudly or perform the bodily functions in public. They had never seen him bathe, aimlessly joke around, or laugh. He would not repeat any of his axioms except for the purpose of deriving additional wisdom from them." This narration was cited by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr-Al-Manthur (6/512). and he attributed it to Ibn Abu Hatim*
 - (2) *Amongst some of the narrations that have been narrated from the wise Luqman was the narration in which he commented to a man that was staring at him, 'You look upon my thick lips with disgust, yet fail to notice the fine speech that flows from them. Indeed, you may recognise the darkness of my skin, but it prevents my heart from not being radiant.'* (Tafsir Al-Qurtubi 7/5317)
 - (3) *Narrated by Imam Muslim in his Sahih (2564), by Ahmad in his Musnad (2/287, 539) and Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (4143). However, the wording that appears here is from Muslim.*

each human being enjoys the same amounts of advantages and disadvantages as all other people. The only attribute that sets one apart from other individuals is piety and righteousness (*taqwa*). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'There is no preference given to an Arab over a non-Arab except for the preference that is associated with piety and acts of righteousness.'⁽¹⁾

There are people who classify occupations into honourable occupations and menial ones. This classification is misguided because as long as the community is in need of a certain occupation, it can never be considered demeaning. Without many such occupations, the community would hardly be able to function. In light of this, how can you think of these jobs as demeaning? Perhaps more importantly, how can an honourable person look upon those who perform these tasks as insignificant?

By Allah, if all of the cabinet ministers stayed home for an entire week, no substantial change would take place in most of our lives. On the other hand, if sanitation workers or people responsible for handling the sewer drains were to strike for a single day, our world would turn into a cesspool. How can some people deride these occupations and those who perform them?

Indeed, people who perform such jobs are pleased with very modest sustenance, and in many cases, they endure burdens that others would find overwhelming. In all of our mocking and scoffing, we forget that Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'O, you who have believed! No men shall ridicule [other] men. It may well be that those [whom they ridicule] are better than they [who ridicule].' (*al-Hujurat*: 11)

If we refocus our attention on *Luqman peace be upon him* one might be led to ask, 'If he was not a prophet, why did Allah grant him this wisdom?'

(1) Narrated by Ahmad in his *Musnad* (5/411) on the authority of Abu Nadra who related it from one of the companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It was also narrated by Abu Na'im in *Hilyat Al-Awliya'* (3/100) on the authority of Abu Nadra who related it from Jabir ibn 'Abdullah Allah *be pleased with him* who said, 'Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* addressed us during the Tashreeq days of the pilgrimage. He said, "O, you assembly of men and women! Your Lord is One and your father is one! There is no preference given to an Arab over a non-Arab, nor any shown to a non-Arab over an Arab, nor a white over a black, nor a black over a white, besides through piety!"'

Allah *Glorified is He* granted him wisdom by assisting and inspiring him to make sound judgments. Allah *the Almighty* provided Luqman these blessings, in accordance with His saying: 'If you remain conscious of Allah, He will bless you with a standard by which to discern the truth from the falsehood' (*al-Anfal*: 29). This means that whoever uses the guidance of Allah *Glorified is He* to preserve the original state in which they were created, they will be capable of receiving direct inspiration and wisdom from Him.

For instance, your son may ask for a certain sum of money so that he can try his hand at some business in the local market. You would probably give him a smaller amount (than the amount he requested) to preliminarily test his abilities. If he succeeds at investing this amount of money and his venture proves profitable, your confidence will increase. Later, you may probably grant him more money on a second occasion. Human beings are in the same situation (with their Lord). If they excel at being in the constant company of Allah *Glorified is He* He will unceasingly grant them additional favours and will shower them with His blessings.

This explains why 'Umar ibn 'Abd Al-'Aziz⁽¹⁾ said, 'The only thing that prevents us from being granted the knowledge that we do not know is our inability to put the things we do know into practice.' Certainly, if we deserved to receive more blessings, Allah *Glorified is He* would have granted them to us. If we had been faithful to what we had already learnt, applying this knowledge in enhancing our lives, we would unceasingly receive a further transcendental form of it from our Lord. Conversely, if we attain knowledge without acting according to its wisdom, what could possibly be the benefit of more knowledge? Indeed, we would have then failed to profit from the knowledge we already had!

(1) He is 'Umar ibn 'Abd Al-'Aziz ibn Marwan Al-Umawiy Allah be pleased with him. He was known as Abu Hafs and was born in Medina (61 AH) where he was also raised. He served as its governor for Al-Walid, and then he was chosen to serve in the Eastern Mediterranean region as a cabinet minister for Sulayman ibn 'Abd Al-Malik. In the year 99 AH, the time immediately following the reign of Sulayman, he became the Caliph and was given the oath of allegiance in the Mosque of Damascus. Upon taking office, he made it illegal to curse 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb Allah be pleased with him. This was a reversal of the policies of the Umawiy leaders before him, who had made a practice of cursing 'Ali Allah be pleased with him from the pulpits. His life ended in the year 101 AH, when he was forty years of age. He spent roughly two and a half years in office.

Just as scholars have exerted great effort in knowing the character and ethnicity of Luqman,⁽¹⁾ *peace be upon him* they have also written a great deal about his wisdom. It is written that one of his contemporaries spoke to him at length and questioned him, 'Were you not a slave? Did you not work in the service of another man. On what account then, were you granted wisdom?'

Luqman replied, 'On account of my deep respect for the authority of my Lord, my responsibility to the work that He has placed upon me, speaking truthfully and not indulging in matters which do not concern me.'⁽²⁾

These characteristics contain enough guidance to suffice every believer. Anyone who faithfully adheres to these principles will speak words of wisdom. By Allah *the Almighty* if the only characteristic he mentioned was truthfulness in speech, it would have been sufficient.

These were the attributes by which Luqman *peace be upon him* a servant of humble origins, ascended to such a lofty rank. Allah *the Exalted* gave him great wisdom despite the fact that he was not a prophet or a messenger. Indeed, a chapter of the Noble Quran was even named after him. All of this serves to prove that if a regular human being is principled and sincere in his obedience to Allah *Glorified is He* Allah will grant him His abundant favours and raise him to be amongst prophets and messengers *peace be upon them*.

The following narration⁽³⁾ is often cited as an expression of the wisdom that Luqman was said to possess. On one occasion, his master told him to

(1) *The story of Luqman peace be upon him with those who mocked him for his black skin and slavery.*

(2) *This was narrated by Ibn Abu Ad-Dunya in Kitab As-Samt (Narration # 675) (Dar Al-i'tisam, 1986 c.e.). The following version of the tradition was also narrated by Ibn Jarir on the authority of Ibn Qays. 'One day, a man passed by Luqman peace be upon him and a group of people that were with him and asked, "Are you not the slave of other people?" "Indeed, I was," Luqman responded. The man then asked, "Did you not tend sheep at the foot of a mountain?" Again, Luqman responded in the affirmative. At this, the man asked, "So what is to account for all that I see in you?" Luqman replied, "Piety, speaking truthfully, upholding the trusts that are given to me, and observing silence regarding those matters which do not concern me."' This narratioin was cited by As-Suyuti in Al-Durr Al-Manthur fi At-tafsir bil Ma'thur (6/512).*

(3) *The story of Luqman peace be upon him with his master when the latter ordered him to slaughter a goat.*

slaughter a goat and bring him the two best pieces of its meat. Luqman *peace be upon him* slaughtered the goat as he was ordered, but subsequently presented his master with the heart and tongue of the animal. The next day the master said to him, 'Slaughter a goat, but this time, and bring me the two worst pieces of the animal.' Again, Luqman *peace be upon him* returned to him with the heart and tongue of the animal. At that point, his master asked him, 'Did you not present these yesterday on the basis that they were the choicest parts of the goat?' Luqman *peace be upon him* answered, 'When these two are good, there is nothing better than them. On the other hand, when they are bad, there is nothing that is worse!'⁽¹⁾

Interestingly enough, after the time of Luqman, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* informed us of a similar adage when he said, 'Indeed, within the body is a morsel of flesh that, if pure, the entire body is pure, and if corrupt, the entire body is corrupt. Indeed, this part of the body is the heart.'⁽²⁾ In another Hadith, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Whoever can preserve what is in between his jaws (*al-lahyan*)⁽³⁾ and what is between his legs will enter Paradise.'⁽⁴⁾

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- (1) This was narrated by Ibn Abu Shayba as well as Ahmad and Ibn Jarir. They narrated the narration on the authority of Khalid Ar-Rabe'y. This was mentioned by As-Suyuti in *Ad-Durr Al-Manthur* (5/516).
 - (2) The authenticity of this Hadith is agreed upon. It was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his *Sahih* (2051), and by Muslim in his *Sahih* (1599), from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Nu'aman ibn Bashir Allah be pleased with him. The complete version of the Hadith is as follows: 'Indeed, that which is lawful is clear and that which is unlawful is also clear. However, between them there are dubious matters whose statuses of legality are unknown by the majority of people. Whoever steers clear of these dubious matters will preserve the integrity of his faith and honour, while the one who falls into these dubious matters will easily fall into the unlawful. The latter is like a shepherd who grazes his flock near a sanctuary, while being close enough to wander into the sanctuary! Indeed, every king has a sanctuary. Indeed, the sanctuary of Allah consists of the actions that He has made impermissible.' The conclusion of this Hadith is the segment cited above (in the text).
 - (3) *Al-lahyan* are the bones that support the roof and the floor of the mouth. These are the two bones which support the teeth of every organism that has jaws. (*Lisan Al-'Arab*, under the heading: l, h, a).
 - (4) This was narrated by Abu Nu'aym in *Hilyat Al-Awliya'* (3/202) from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Sahl ibn Sa'ad, with this exact wording. The same Hadith appeared in the *Sahih* of Al-Bukhari (6474). This Hadith, also narrated on the=

It was also narrated that Luqman *peace be upon him* answered his people's legal questions and that they had a great deal of confidence in his judgment. However, this was before the era of Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him*. Once Prophet Dawud (David) was sent, Luqman *peace be upon him* discontinued the practice of issuing opinions on the legal matters of the people. The people asked him, 'Why did you stop judging in our legal matters?' He gave a response which reflected his wisdom by replying, 'Do I not find it sufficient when someone has been sent to suffice me?' He did not want to claim this high responsibility, when Allah *Glorified is He* has already sent Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* to carry the responsibility.

This response makes it clear that Luqman *peace be upon him* plainly acknowledged being a righteous servant of Allah *Glorified is He* who only had a natural wisdom. On the other hand, Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* was a Divine messenger from Allah, the Exalted. The wise choice for Luqman was to hand over the task of issuing legal judgments. Perhaps, Prophet Dawud (David) would offer opinions that excelled than the opinions of Luqman *peace be upon them*. In light of this consideration, Luqman relinquished his position with a good heart and without resentment.

Some scholars have said that Allah *Glorified is He* gave Luqman the choice between being a noble prophet or merely being a wise man. Luqman replied, 'Verily, You gave me the choice, O, Lord, and I have chosen to cast my lot with comfort as opposed to difficulty. Nonetheless, if you choose difficulty for me, O, Lord, I will accept it willingly as soon as I recognise it. Indeed, I know that You will never forsake me.'⁽¹⁾

= authority of Sahl, contains the following wording: 'Whoever can offer me a guarantee to preserve what is in between his jaws (refraining from misdeeds of the tongue) and what is between his legs (by refraining from the misdeeds of the private parts), I will guarantee him Paradise.'

(1) This was narrated by Al-Hakim At-Tirmidhi in Nawadir Al-Usul on the authority of Abu Muslim Al-Khawlanj Allah be pleased with him that he said, 'Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, "Verily, Luqman was deeply contemplative, optimistic and overly silent. Indeed, he truly loved Allah so He loved him and made him wise. Before the time of Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* he was called upon to assume political office. It was said to him, "Luqman, would you like that Allah make you a leader who ruled justly over the people?" He responded, "If my Lord=

Allah *Glorified is He* gave Luqman *peace be upon him* the ability to speak wisely concerning some matters, with articulations that preceded some prophetic Hadiths. This was to demonstrate that it is possible for a regular human being to reach such transcendental levels of righteousness, as Allah *the Almighty* said in a prophetic Hadith: 'O, My servant, obey me and become righteous. You will say to the things you want, "Be!", and they will exist as you commanded.'⁽¹⁾ The favour of Allah *Glorified is He* has no boundaries, nor does it entail difficulty of any sort. The door of Allah is always wide open. However, you must be eligible to enter that door and unceasingly enjoy the company of your Lord.

We also find the following story⁽²⁾ that tells about one of the wise sayings that have been attributed to Luqman *peace be upon him*. Luqman went on a long journey and was greeted by one of his students when he returned. He asked the student, 'How is my father?' And the student replied that Luqman's father had passed away. Luqman responded, 'Now I have more control over my affairs.' Then, he asked about his mother. Upon learning that she had also died, Luqman said, 'I have been relieved of my greatest concern.' 'What about my wife?' Luqman asked. Once the boy informed him of her death, he said, 'This means that I will renew my bed.' Then, he learnt of his sister's death,

= obligates me, I have to accept His orders. Indeed, I know that were He to obligate me, He would aid me along the way, teach, and protect me. Nevertheless, if He is giving me the choice, I choose ease and well-being over difficulty.''' This narration was cited by As-Suyuti in *Ad-Durr Al-Manthur* (6/511).

- (1) Al-Bukhari narrated a Hadith to the same effect in his *Sahih* (6502) on the authority of Abu Hurayra, who said, 'Prophet Muhammad said, "Verily, Allah has pronounced, 'I am at war with whoever shows open enmity towards a friend of mine. Indeed, My servant does not draw near to Me with anything more beloved to Me than what I have made an obligation upon him. Afterwards, My servant continues to draw near to Me by performing non-obligatory acts of worship until I love him. Once I love him, I become the hearing with which he hears, the vision with which he sees, the hand with which he grasps and the leg with which walks.'"' The remainder of the Hadith has been quoted above (in the text). Concerning this text, At-Tufi (Sulayman 'Abd Al- Qawiy As-Sarsari d.716 A.H.) commented, 'All scholars of considerable rank agree that this Hadith is metonymical and expresses a metaphor for aiding, protecting, and assisting a servant. It is as if Allah Himself is becoming the means through which the slave seeks support.'
- (2) The story of Luqman *peace be upon him* and his follower when he asked him about the state of his father.

upon which he said, 'She has preserved my honor, for now I am free of the responsibility of protecting her.' Lastly, he asked the student about his brother. Conversely, when he learnt of his brother's death, he said, 'This news has broken my back!'⁽¹⁾

These words can only be said by a person blessed with wisdom, for indeed, in many instances, undutiful children are pleased to learn of their fathers' deaths. Unfortunately, the source of their elation is the inheritance that they will get to enjoy.

Conversely, at learning of the death of his father, Luqman *peace be upon him* said, 'Now I have greater control over my affairs.' This implies that while his father was alive, his father had a great control over his affairs. In light of this wisdom, we can understand the statement of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'You (the son), as well as what you own, belong to your father.'⁽²⁾ This indicates that it is shameful to say: 'I own this and that,' during the lifetime of your father. In the present day and age, children have mostly lost such lofty values. Lamentably, nowadays, we find sons ordering their fathers to assign assets for them in their wills!

Additionally, within the statement of Luqman regarding his wife's death, 'I will (now) renew my bed,' we are able to understand a very significant

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- (1) *The following was narrated by 'Abdullah ibn Ahmad ibn Hanbal in his Zawa'id on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn Dinar. 'Upon returning from a journey, Luqman was greeted in the street by a young man whom Luqman questioned, 'what happened to my father?' After learning from the young man that his father had passed away, he said, 'Praise be unto Allah. I now have greater control over my affairs.' Then, he asked about his mother. Upon learning that she had also died, Luqman said, 'I have been relieved of my greatest concern.' 'What about my wife?' Luqman asked. Once the boy informed him of her death, he said, 'This means that I will renew my bed.' Then, he learned of his sister's death, upon which he said, 'She has preserved my honour, for now I am free of the responsibility of protecting her.' Lastly, he asked the student about his brother. Conversely, when he learnt of his brother's death, he said, 'This has broken my back!' This was cited by As-Siuyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (6/519).*
- (2) *On the authority of 'Amr ibn Al-'As who said, 'On one occasion, a Bedouin came to the Messenger of God and said, "My father wants to ruin my fortune." The Messenger responded, "You and your money belong to your father. Indeed, the best of what you eat is that which comes from your own efforts, and the money of your children is from your efforts, so enjoy it in good spirits!"' Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (2/179, 214) and Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (3530).*

point. He would never think of sleeping with any other woman during his wife's life. This means that he chose not to marry another woman during the life of his first wife and showed respect to her jealousy which is inherent to women.

Furthermore, we could understand another meaning from the phrase, 'I will (now) renew my bed.' Out of consideration for the feelings of his new wife, Luqman would not allow a second wife into the bedroom he shared with his first wife. Indeed, this could cause conflict and ignite her envy, even if the first wife had passed away. He desired to enter the new partnership without spite and wanted to block every pretext that could prevent her from being a source of tranquillity for him. Likewise, he wanted to prevent every pretext that could prevent him from being a source of tranquillity for her.

The Mother of the Believers, 'Aisha, Allah be pleased with her, was found to be jealous when the name of Khadijah *Allah be pleased with her* was so much as mentioned, even though Khadijah had passed away before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had married 'Aisha. Indeed, on one occasion, Fatima *Allah be pleased with her* the daughter of Prophet Muhammad, entered upon her father in a state of frustration. He asked her, 'What angers you, O, daughter of her father?'

Fatima replied, 'By Allah, 'Aisha said to me, "indeed, the Messenger of Allah (Prophet Muhammad) had married your mother as a widow, and thus, I am the only virgin he has ever taken in marriage.'" Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, told his daughter Fatima, 'If she mentions this to you again, tell her, "My mother (Khadijah) married the Messenger of Allah while he was a virgin. His marriage to you occurred after he had become a widower.'"⁽¹⁾

(1) *If truth be told, 'Aisha was somewhat jealous of Khadijah despite the fact that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him did not marry 'Aisha until after Khadijah's death. An expression of this occurs in the following Hadith which was collected by Muslim in his Sahih (2437) in a chapter entitled 'The virtues of Khadija': 'Aisha Allah be pleased with her said to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him "Why must you consistently mention an old, rosy-cheeked Qurayshi woman (Khadija)? Her time has passed. Besides, after her, Allah has given you better than her." Prophet Muhammad's face changed and he scolded 'Aisha angrily, saying, "By Allah, He has not given me better than her. She believed in me when the people disbelieved. She confirmed my truthfulness when people were calling me a liar. She aided me with her money when the people ostracised me, and it was through her—and her alone—that Allah granted me a child."*

Observe the manners as well as the quick thinking displayed by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in this Hadith. Afterwards, 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* never repeated those words to Fatima *Allah be pleased with her*.

Someone might be led to ask, 'How could 'Aisha be jealous when she is one of the Mothers of the Believers and a wife of the Messenger of Allah?' Some scholars have pointed out that she only meant love for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by her jealousy. Despite the age difference that existed between them, Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* was content with Prophet Muhammad. Indeed, this jealousy was due to the sublime qualities that she recognised in his behaviour. She did not simply view him as a man of advanced years. On the contrary, she saw qualities in him that surpassed any younger man.

Now, we return to Allah's description of Luqman: 'And, indeed, We granted this wisdom unto Luqman,' (*Luqman*: 12). This makes it clear that Allah *Glorified is He* was the source of Luqman's wisdom. If we explore the meaning of the word itself, we find that the Arabic word *hikma* (wisdom) refers to the process of placing things in their rightful positions. The word *haakim* (ruler) is derived from the same linguistic root, for indeed, a ruler is supposed to put justice in its proper place.

We even observe some derivatives of this root within our daily usage. For instance, the iron implement that we place in the mouth of the horse, in order to guide its movements, is named the *hakama*. The objectives for which people ride horses differ. On one occasion, I might ride a horse for the purpose of taking a brief stroll. On another occasion, I may ride it for the purpose of hunting or advancing in a battle. Performing each of these requires that the horse assume a specific gait. My responsibility is guiding my horse in a way that enables it to perform any of these intended tasks.

Therefore, wisdom refers to the process of placing things in their rightful positions. It is the outcome of many praiseworthy character traits and the source of many others. We find that the judgments which emanate from a wise mind are easily and effortlessly placed in their proper positions. For instance, when you ask a scholar of Islamic law who has spent twenty years teaching at Al-Azhar University about a particular religious ruling, he usually

answers you with ease and without effort. He can generally articulate the appropriate answer without giving the matter extensive thought or preparing his response. Indeed, at this point in his career, his legal opinions resemble natural reflexes, in that they are not laborious or taxing to his energies.

Another expression of wisdom is when Allah *Glorified is He* guides you to interpret and extract novel benefits from former things that He had created.

Allah *Glorified is He* started this verse we are studying with the words: 'And, indeed (*wa laqad*)' (*Luqman*: 12). In the Arabic language, the words *wa laqad* (and indeed) are typically used to express an oath. The gravity of the oath is emphasised by the use of the word *laqad* (indeed) since it indicates the authenticity of the forthcoming assertion.

Then, Allah *the Most High* says: '...We granted (*atayna*),' (*Luqman*: 12). The word *atayna* (we granted) refers to the process of Allah *the Almighty* giving His blessings. Generally, Allah grants both obvious bounties as well as hidden blessings to His servants, in accordance with His Divine plan for them. Before Allah *Glorified is He* created human beings, He created the forms of sustenance that they would need. Therefore, Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* the first human being arrived upon a world that contained all of the essential needs of his life such as air, water, soil, sky, food and drink. All of this had been submitted to the use of man. He played no part in achieving this process although he was the principal beneficiary of this submission. This is the first expression of Allah's 'giving'. Even prior to the creation of the human body in the primordial realm of spirits, Allah *the Almighty* blessed human beings with the moral qualities and vitality of spirit needed to sustain them.

Every craftsman specifies a clear objective before he engages in his work. The first thing that he does is lay out his blueprint. He does not construct anything before determining what it is and how it could be used. Furthermore, even before a craftsman can determine what he is going to produce, he must have a clear method to proceed upon his construction.

Before Allah *Glorified is He* created human beings, He had provided them with life's physical and moral essentials. In addition to the basic essentials, He also provided them with a practical guide that would lead them upon the

proper course in life. Therefore, He had clarified the purpose of their existence. Allah *the Exalted* calls our attention to this event when He says: 'The most gracious (Allah) has imparted this Quran (unto man). He has created man,' (*ar-Rahman*: 1-3). Thus, before Allah *Glorified is He* created the human being, He provided him with the Quran as the practical methodology to sustain his life.

Accordingly, we can conclude that Allah's bounties are either manifest or hidden. Additionally, these bounties are one of two forms. Firstly, there are material bounties, such as air, food, and drink, which enhance life's material qualities. Secondly, there are sublime bounties which enrich life's spiritual value. These are Divine Revelations and Messages that were conveyed by Allah's messengers, regarding His Commandments and Prohibitions.

Considering that Allah *the Almighty* has given generously to all the beings of His creation, why did He mention Luqman in particular in this chapter? Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And, indeed, We granted wisdom unto Luqman,' (*Luqman*: 12). Many scholars have stated that Allah *Glorified is He* prepared His messengers' hearts, even before conveying His Message to them. Through the story of Luqman, Allah informed us that a man's pure uncorrupted nature can be guided towards Him, even without the assistance of revelation.

In this sense, it was narrated that "Umar *Allah be pleased with him* made suggestions to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about certain issues. Later, Divine verses confirmed several of 'Umar's suggestions! It is striking that 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* made these suggestions in the presence of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who is the principal source of Islamic legislation after the Quran. However, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to establish the fact that the innate and sincere disposition of human beings can enable them to naturally perceive certain truths. Indeed, their pure human disposition may recognise the truth, even before revelations descend to inform their minds about it. Nevertheless, Allah's bounties are not granted haphazardly.

The first bounties were given to Prophet Adam *peace be upon him*. Allah *the Almighty* decreed that He would make Adam His vicegerent on this Earth. However, this does not imply that Adam was Allah's first creation, as Allah *Glorified is He* never said, 'Verily, the first thing I created was mankind.' We can find evidence that Adam was not the first form of creation in the

following verse: 'We had created the invisible jinns [long] before that, out of fire with scorching winds' (*al-Hijr*: 27).

Therefore, we can understand that the matter of creation is, indeed, feasible and easy for Allah *Glorified is He*. We only need to observe Allah's statement: 'Are you not aware that Allah has created the heavens and the earth in accordance with the truth? He can, if He so wills, do away with you and bring forth a new creation (instead). Indeed, this is not difficult for Allah' (*Ibrahim*: 19-20). This means that this issue of creation is not a rare occurrence or a single event that had only occurred once.

The scholars have produced a great deal of literature about the possibilities of other created beings before ours, like the worlds of the hinns,⁽¹⁾ binns, jinns and other living beings that only Allah *Glorified is He* knows about. You should, however, bear this in mind if you encounter an injudicious argument against our faith, saying: 'Archaeologists have settled upon the fact that there were created beings present before Adam. How then, can you say that Adam was the first member of creation?' No scholar has ever said that Adam was the first member of creation. We only maintain that he was the first member of the species we refer to as human beings. However, in the overall scope of things, he was preceded by other created beings. It was Allah's Will to make Adam as Allah's vicegerent on this earth. Afterwards, He informed the angels: 'Behold, I am about to establish upon earth one who shall inherit it.' (*al-Baqara*: 30)

Indeed, when Allah *the Exalted* informed the angels of this news, He was not taking their advice. He was only informing them about a matter that had already been decided. In fact, the angels were informed of this event because they would play a role regarding the existence of this newly appointed vicegerent (of Allah *Glorified is He*). Thus, those who were addressed by Allah's Words, 'Behold, I am about to establish upon earth one who shall inherit it' (*al-Baqara*: 30), were only a small group of angels. Those were angels who had been selected to play a role in the life of this new created being. The rest

(1) Ibn Sayyid said, 'The hinns are creatures that differ from jinns. It is said that hinns were created during the interval that separated the creation of jinns and mankind. Al-Farra' mentioned that hinns were the dogs of the realm of jinns.' (*Lisan Al-'Arab*, under the entry: *h-n-n*).

of the angels were not familiar with Adam *peace be upon him* and their only concern was Allah *Glorified is He*.

The Quran gave us a very detailed account of this event, when it told us how Allah *the Almighty* addressed Satan (Iblis) as he refused to prostrate to Adam *peace be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* asked Satan, 'Are you too proud [to bow down before another created being] or are you one of the superior creatures (*Al-'aaleen*)?' (*Sad*: 75) The Arabic word *Al-'aaleen* refers to the other angels who were not commanded by Allah *Glorified is He* to prostrate before Adam *peace be upon him*.

It is important to point out that Allah *the Almighty* honoured Adam as soon as He had created him with His own hands. This means that Allah *the Exalted* did not create Adam in the same way He had originated other created beings, through the command, 'Be.' Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* said to Iblis, 'O, Iblis! What has kept you from prostrating yourself before that [being] which I have created with My hands?' (*Sad*: 75).

As such, we can conclude that Allah's creation of Adam *peace be upon him* with His hands indicates concern for this created being. Indeed, the hand is the means by which we perform most tasks. Interestingly enough, we still place a tremendous amount of value on things which are made by hand, as we say proudly about any man-made object, for instance, 'This was handmade.' In this statement, we are asserting that the product was not made by an inanimate machine. On the contrary, it was made by a thinking individual who had mastered his craft.

There are some ignorant people who find it pleasing to claim, 'It is due to Adam that we were removed from Paradise!' Allah *the Most High* did not say that He created Adam to dwell in paradise! Indeed, it was not his disobedience to his Lord that caused him to be removed from it. Allah *Glorified is He* said, before the creation of Adam: 'Behold, I am about to establish upon earth one who shall inherit it.' (*al-Baqara*: 30) This makes it clear that Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* was created to dwell on this earth. Therefore, his initial moments in creation were not in the Garden of Eternity. It was only a temporal garden in which he was tested. Some people believe that the word *janna* (garden) refers only to the Gardens of Paradise. This is not the case as

Allah *Glorified is He* said in another story: '[As for such sinners,] behold, We [but] try them as We tried the owners of the garden (*janna*), who vowed that they would surely harvest its fruits on the next morning.' (*al-Qalam*: 17)

Regarding this, we can cite Allah's statement, 'Propound unto them the parable of two men, upon one of whom We had bestowed two gardens' (*al-Kahf*: 32). Linguistically, the word *janna* (garden) refers to any place rich with dense trees that enshroud walkers through it. Additionally, a true garden obviates the need to leave it; indeed, what it contains suffices its dwellers and fulfils any need they might have. All essentials are available. The garden that Adam *peace be upon him* entered during the initial phase of his life, immediately after he was created, was this type of garden. He entered it because Allah *the Exalted* wanted to test him first. Do not we do the same when testing candidates for a certain position before taking their place even a soccer player?

Once we have the trainee, we rehabilitate him for a test. We assure that the testing conditions are suitable; he has all necessary needs. In fact, we are normally willing to take on the responsibility of providing all things, which would optimise their performance. Allah *the Most High* did the same with Adam *peace be upon him*. He said to him, 'O, Adam, dwell you and your wife in this garden, and eat freely thereof, both of you, whatever you may wish but do not approach this one tree, lest you become wrongdoers.' (*al-Baqara*: 35).

When we begin to compare what Allah *the Most High* made lawful for Adam *peace be upon him* to what was forbidden, we find that He made everything in the garden lawful excepting one particular tree, which was clearly specified. We notice the wording of the statement of Allah *the Almighty*: 'do not approach' (*al-Baqara*: 35). He did not say, 'Do not eat from.' Approaching something increases the temptation to enjoy it. Therefore, make it easier on yourself and maintain a healthy distance. This duty ordained on Adam is symbolic of human responsibility to refrain from certain acts by following Divine commands and prohibitions.

The Lord *the Most High* calls Adam's attention to the adversarial beginning that would come to mark his relationship with Satan. Pursuant with his status as an enemy, Allah *the Most High* advises Adam *peace be upon him* to be cautious of Satan. Evidently, arrogance and conceit led Satan to refuse prostrating himself

to Adam *peace be upon him* in obedience to the Divine command. If truth be told, when Allah *the Exalted* issued the command to prostrate to Adam *peace be upon him* His focus was obedience and submission to His command. That is to say, it was not a prostration to Adam for some inherent worthiness. This explains why the orders of Allah *the Almighty* differ according to the commanded one. On one occasion, He might prohibit a certain thing only to command performing it on a different occasion. The point of both orders is to test the range of your adherence to Divine commands and prohibitions. Within the Great Pilgrimage, for example, Allah orders that you to kiss a stone, but also He orders to stone a pillar (made of stone)! Both of these activities are performed with rocks. However, the inherent value of rocks is not the issue here; rather, it is about Allah's Commands and Prohibitions. Ultimately, the worth of Allah's Commands and Prohibitions has nothing to do with ascertaining their underlying wisdom or attaining benefit thereby. For instance, whenever the use of water to perform ablution is impossible, the use of dust is an alternative. Someone might comment, 'Ablution is for cleanliness, so how can dust achieve it?' In response, there is a difference between cleanliness and purification.

Dry ablution (*tayammum*) purifies spiritually through the use of the element that is actually the substance of your creation. More importantly however, performing this practice expresses the level of your adherence to Divine commands. Such is the command to do in preparation for prayer. You are not to enter prayers without some sort of preparation. Besides, prayer is the principal means of rectifying your soul and life. Of which, the latter is based on water that you use in normal ablution and the dust that you use in dry ablution. Accordingly, we must acknowledge that these two elements have special distinction: they can be used to prepare for entering the prayer and dialoguing with Allah.

Truthfully speaking, it is not appropriate for a believer to question the acts of worship in a pretentious search after meanings and wisdom or even their worldly advantages. It is sufficient to say that the underlying reason for performing this particular act of worship is that Allah commanded it, or the rationale behind this prohibition is that He prohibited it. Therefore, it is narrated that 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'If the crux of the matter were logic, the bottom of our leather socks would be more deserving of being

wiped than the upper part.'⁽¹⁾ Thus, we can conclude that the issue is actually one of obedience and adherence to Divine commands and prohibitions. It is completely inappropriate to say that the wisdom of fasting is that it makes rich people feel the pain of hunger and results in their being more compassionate towards those who are. Indeed, I would only need to respond by asking, 'Why then, does the poor person fast?' Previously, we repeatedly used analogy to explain this issue. For example, the most valuable thing to man is his health. If he contracts some type of illness, the first thing that crosses his mind is to contact a physician who specialises in treating his illness. Once he arrives at the physician, he submits himself to his examination. At the completion of the diagnosis, the physician will prescribe some medication. The man will then take the prescribed medication without enquiring about the reasons for a certain medication or recipe. We see this procedure daily. Why do not we question it? Simply, the physician is trusted and reliable for his learning, studies and specialisation. You do not debate him about the medication. Meanwhile, the physician is still a human being and is prone to forgetfulness, errors and absent-mindedness. Yet, as pointed out, he is rarely debated. The underlying reason for a certain medication is simply that it was prescribed by a physician. In fact, the principal reason for performing any command is the Commander.

In terms of worship, it is the Lord. Accordingly, it is not befitting of a believer, after professing belief in Allah, Divine Wisdom and Power, to seek the wisdom of every command from his Lord *the Most High*. Let us now return to Adam *peace be upon him*. We said that the garden he entered was for the purpose of testing and training. It was not the eternal Garden of Paradise. Within it, Adam *peace be upon him* was tested on upon Allah's Command (eat freely) and His prohibition (do not approach). Additionally, he was informed: 'Beware of Satan. Verily, he is your enemy. He will incite you to do evil by planting his insinuations in your heart. His desire is that you join him in disobedience. He wants to drag you down the road to perdition with him.' Adam *peace be upon him* and his wife stayed in the garden and ate therein.

(1) 'Ali Allah be pleased with him said, 'If the basis of faith were logic, the bottom of our leather socks would be more deserving of being wiped than the upper part. To be sure, I witnessed the Messenger of Allah wiping the upper part of his leather socks for ablution.' Abu Dawud, Sunnan, (Hadith Number: 162)

Allah informs us, ‘of whatever they wished’ without approaching the tree that was pointed out to them by Him. They thus remained until the insinuations of Satan and his temptation—to eat of the tree—came upon them, despite the fact that Allah *the Most High* had already ‘immunised’ them against Satan’s attack. Indeed, even with this, Adam *peace be upon him* still succumbed to heedlessness.

Allah *the Almighty* called this heedlessness to the attention of Adam’s descendants after him: Indeed, Satan will never give up attacking you. He will persistently approach you with tricks just as he approached your father Adam *peace be upon him*. They too were alerted about Satan. Use your minds carefully to sort through the impulses that he induces by way of the insinuations he plants in your hearts. What did Satan tempt Adam *peace be upon him* to eat from the forbidden tree? Simply, ‘Satan whispered unto the two with a view to making them conscious of their nakedness, of which [hitherto] they had been unaware, and he said, "Your Lord has but forbidden you this tree lest you two become [as] angels, or lest you live forever."' (al-A‘raf: 20) Is it not logical to ask Satan why you have not eaten from the tree to be an angel or eternal being? You would not have had to say, ‘Grant me a respite until the Day when they shall be raised from the dead!’ (al-Hijr: 36) It was Adam’s responsibility to be cautious of satanic tricks and ploys.

In the account of this story, the Lord *the Most High* informs us that Satan will lie in wait for us to prevent us from obedience. If Adam *peace be upon him* and his wife would have approached the tree and eaten from it, there would have been no need to entice them. This is evidence that at first they were very careful in following Allah’s orders; they did not go near the tree following the Divine command. This is why Satan intervened.

In light of this, we say that Satan only intervenes to disrupt obedience to Allah. Satan has no need to tempt a sinner. In other words, Satan tempts those who frequent mosques, not taverns. One who goes to the tavern has himself become a dupe of Satan. Allah recounts the words of Satan, ‘I shall most certainly lie in ambush for them all along your straight way.’ (al-A‘raf: 16) He will hinder ways to righteous deeds and paths to guidance and decency. Satan situates himself in such areas to ruin good works and destroy human relationship with their Lord. Actually, we notice when praying, for example, that you might

forget something. After struggling to remember it, you fail to call it. Nevertheless, once you enter the prayer, surprisingly the thing comes directly to mind. If only we follow the way prescribed by our Creator and say, 'We seek refuge with Allah from Satan, the cursed', Satan would take notice and recognise that we were not heedless. He would know that we had uncovered his plot and were acquainted with his devices. Allah *the Almighty* speaks truthfully when He says: 'If it should happen that a prompting from Satan stirs you up [to blind anger], seek refuge with Allah.' (*al-A'raf*: 200)

Allah *the Exalted* has described Satan as an elusive tempter. In other words, when Allah's name is mentioned he withdraws and recedes. Therefore, if you feel a tempting notion from Satan—even while you are reading the Quran—you should confidently say, 'I seek refuge with Allah from Satan, the cursed.' By doing this, you convey to Satan that you are not unaware of his ploys. He will soon leave you. On the other hand, if you give in to his advances, he will place the tool of deception in your own hands and create a means to preoccupy you with it. Afterward, he leaves you mired in self-deception while he sets off to prompt someone else's heedlessness.

Satan does possess a certain measure of knowledge. Yet, in spite of his knowledge, he is given to carelessness. Indeed, the strongest evidence for this assertion is the fact that he, himself, has articulated his plan and spelled out his ploy even before attempting to mislead us thereby. Allah says in the Quran:

- 'I shall most certainly lie in ambush for them all along your straight way.' (*al-A'raf*: 16)
- 'There will I come upon them from their front and from their backs and from their right and from their left ...' (*al-A'raf*: 17).

It is unusual for the one who plans intrigues and plots to inform those intended with his plots. This means that it is our responsibility to take special precaution against his schemes; our enemy has already informed us about them! You must be cautious concerning the devilish plans. Indeed, he will come at you from four directions. The good news is that there are six directions. He does not approach from two directions. Why did Satan not mention (in his plot) that he would also come to us from above us and below us? Many pointed out the 'above and below directions' represent the directions from which we behold

the Glory of Allah. The servant gazes upon the grandeur of Divinity from above and experiences the submissiveness of worship when he prostrates from below.

Therefore, you should consider above and below directions in which you enjoy the accompaniment of your Lord. Satan—lest we forget—has no means to approach you unless you are distanced from your Lord. We have already offered an analogy for this; perhaps restating it here is beneficial. A boy walking in the company of his father and holding his hand will have no naughty peers to harm him. Only when he walks alone, he exposes himself to such a threat. This proves Satan's knowledge and deceptiveness. We catch a glimpse of that in the Quranic account of his statement, 'I shall most certainly beguile them all in to grievous error, [all] save such of them as are truly your servants!' (*Sad*: 82-83) He says to the Lord, 'I will not come near the servants who are constantly in Your Providence and company.' Despite his knowledge, Satan proved conceited and heedless as he chooses to rebel against His Lord. Accordingly, Allah *the Most High* forewarned Adam *peace be upon him* against the plot of Satan. Adam's first responsibility was to prevent the ruse that led him to eat from the tree. However, he gave in to heedlessness, disregarded the command of his Lord and ate from the tree. After he disobeyed the command of his Lord, his nature began to change; he and his wife felt shame. When he defecated, it marked the first time Adam sensed his own nakedness.

Again, what is the difference between the opening through which food enters and that through which it exits? Why was it through the evacuation of his bowels that he began to sense his nakedness and why not when he was putting the food in his mouth? In response, Adam *peace be upon him* was following the guidelines of his Lord by enjoying the fruits of the garden and the 'cuisine' provided Him. It is a cuisine given with wisdom and according to a specific measure. It catered to his every need without excess. Adam's system had nothing left; he did not experience gas or flatulence and did not feel the urge to answer the call of nature. In that state, his anus had yet to acquire a specific function; it was simply an orifice of the body, much like his mouth.

He disobeyed the order of his Lord and tasted the tree and the food he consumed began to change in his stomach. He experienced other physiological changes. For the first time, he experienced flatulence and had to defecate. As

soon as Adam tasted the food, he became embarrassed and felt uncomfortable; he felt that his anus was a private part that should be concealed. To be sure, natural human disposition will lead men and women to purify themselves of filth. This explains why Adam *peace be upon him* attempted to protect himself from filth by covering his private parts with leaves. From that time on, Adam was never able to block the release of waste from that orifice, and the release of waste thereby will always be something that characterises the physiology of his descendants.

We can see that the Lord *the Most High* arranged this test for Adam *peace be upon him* in the garden. He prepared his food but forbade him a particular tree.⁽¹⁾ Allah *the Exalted* had given him a positive command to enjoy the garden as liked. He only prohibited him to eat from a certain tree and warned him against the devilish enmity. Once he submitted to Satan's temptations and fell into incongruity with the command of his Lord—he failed to follow His guidance, Allah forced him to leave the garden and go out to the land. Nevertheless, he would carefully consider that experience that would serve as a sign for him and his descendants after him. Briefly, if you proceed upon My Way in accordance with my prescription, you will never suffer imperfection in creation. We observe practical examples of this fact. Noticeably, human community suffers imperfection when Divine commands are disobeyed. This was the first human contact. Allah *the Almighty* then willed that human communities fall to heedlessness. As a result, He sent them messengers to proclaim His Way. His Messengers marked another contact. Allah *the Most High* says, 'We vouchsafed unto Dawud (David) a book of Divine wisdom.' (*an-Nisa'*: 163) Regarding

(1) Allah says, 'O, Adam, dwell you and your wife in this garden, eat freely thereof, both of you, whatever you may wish, but do not approach this one tree, lest you become wrongdoers' (*al-A'raf*: 35). In his *Tafsir*, Ibn Kathir said, 'There is much debate about what this tree exactly was. Ibn 'Abbas, Sa'eed ibn Jubayr, and others said it is the grape tree. The Jews and Wahb ibn Munabbih said it is wheat. Mujahid, Qatada and Ibn Jurayj said it is the fig tree. Ibn 'Abbas is also quoted to say that it is a spike of grain. Abu Malik said that it is date-palm tree. Ibn Kathir said, 'These are the six opinions on this tree. Abu Ja'far ibn Jarir mentioned that the correct approach to this issue is to say, "Allah prohibited Adam and his wife from eating a particular tree in the garden. Although we know they ate from it, we do not have any sure knowledge about the type of that tree. Allah has not given any evidence to this effect, nor do we find any evidence on it in the authentic Hadith of the Prophet. In fact, the knowledge of that forbidden tree is of little or no benefit. The fact that it is unknown results in no harm.'"

'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Isa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary), upon whom We bestowed the Gospel.' (*al-Hadid: 27*)

This other 'Divine contact was given secretly as an invisible grace, so it is called 'revelation'. Therefore, faith in the unseen is essential. It is not a part of belief to say that I stand before a group of brothers at Sheikh Sulaiman (Solomon) Mosque. Belief is connected with unseen matters. Throughout ages, the Lord *the Most High* supported His prophets with miracles as well as life systems. Nevertheless, Divine generosity is not limited to messengers but also to other human individuals and even animals. Allah *the Exalted* presents us an example of the wisdom given to Luqman *peace be upon him*: 'Be grateful unto Allah' (*Luqman: 12*). Gratitude is a foundation of wisdom. Show gratitude to the Lord for His Graces given before you exist or ask. He guided your body organs perform their functions even when you are asleep. Allah *the Most High* just says to His servants, 'Take rest and fear nothing. Neither sleep nor slumber overtakes your Lord.'

Gratefulness to Allah actually destroys the cornerstone of self-delusion. Indeed, the most threatening element to human stewardship over the world is their propensity to self-delusion in abuse of Divine graces. A human being often forgets that he is a vicegerent; he considers himself a ruler of the creation. Gratitude to Allah *the Most High* is an acknowledgement that He is the source of the blessings you enjoy. In this regard, we would like to cite the following: 'Allah has brought you forth from your mothers' wombs knowing nothing, but He has endowed you with hearing, sight and minds, so that you might have cause to be grateful.' (*an-Nahl: 78*) It asserts that we must thank Allah for the past graces. We were born without the slightest hint of information. Afterward, human senses and faculties gradually develop until human minds are rich with axioms and values. It is incumbent upon humans to thank Allah for that. He made for us senses and faculties so that we can give thanks for Divine blessings we enjoy.

There is also another form of gratitude for the present blessings. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'From amongst His wonders is this:

- He sends forth the winds that bear glad tidings so that He might give you a taste of His grace [through life-giving rains].

- Ships might sail at his behest and that you might go about in quest of some of His bounties' (*ar-Rum*: 46).
- After enumerating these blessings, Allah concludes the verse by saying, 'And that you might have cause to be grateful' (*ar-Rum*: 46).

Showing gratefulness just came after these numerous favours of Allah gave humanity to prove that it is a grace itself from Him. This form of thanksgiving is identical with the verse in which Allah *the Exalted* says, 'If you are grateful [to me], I shall most certainly give you more and more' (*Ibrahim*: 7). This thanksgiving is equally for past and present blessings. The gratefulness in the statement of Allah *the Most High* 'Be grateful unto Allah' (*Luqman*: 12) is confined to Him. As for showing gratitude to others because of their favours, this gratefulness you display towards a generous friend is finally shown to Allah Who placed him in a position to perform that service for you. This explains why they say, 'You only thank Allah when you thank people who were proven to be good to you.' In other words, Allah *the Almighty* has such generous individuals become a means to meet your needs. The one who performs some good services for you has not created them himself, but Allah did and enabled him to do this kindness. If you trace the successive links of gratitude of anything, you will always end at gratefulness to Allah *the Most High*. Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'for he who is grateful [unto Him] is but grateful for the good of his own self, whereas he who chooses to be ungrateful [ought to know that], verily, Allah is self-sufficient and is not in need of the worlds!' (*Luqman*: 12)

We knew that gratefulness to Allah is the fountainhead of wisdom. Why is that so? Simply, the one who gives thanks enjoys the fruits of his gratitude. Never think that your gratitude affects the Divine self-subsistence. Your gratitude or ingratitude is of no effect on the Lordship. Allah *the Most High* even sustains a disbeliever and does not deprive him of His favours. Truly, Allah *the Exalted* is perfectly self-sufficient: '...he who chooses to be ungrateful [ought to know that], verily, Allah is self-sufficient and is not in need of the worlds!' (*Luqman*: 12) Allah *the Almighty* is aware of His status as Lord, and no disbelieving ingrate can alter it! We are taken by the splendid style employed in this verse. In reference to gratefulness, Allah says, 'he who is

grateful' (*Luqman*: 12). In reference to ungratefulness, He *the Most High* says, 'he who chooses to be ungrateful' (*Luqman*: 12).

He did not say, 'he who is ungrateful'. Let us explore the difference between the two styles. We should observe that this is the Lord's speech (each word is exactly selected to convey a precise meaning). When speaking of the grateful individual, Allah uses the present tense verb 'is' to indicate a person's current as well as future states of gratefulness. Gratefulness differs markedly from ingratitude in that it requires constant renewal to remain intact. The verse suggests that Allah *the Exalted* does not want His servants to remain in a state of perpetual ungratefulness. Perhaps a servant could repent and resume faith. Accordingly, when speaking of ungrateful individuals, Allah alters the wording by saying: 'he who chooses to be ungrateful' (*Luqman*: 12). He chose in the past to be ungrateful, but in the future he may return to the path of gratitude. This is another example of the miraculous Quranic style of conveying its message.

Hameed, or translated as 'not in need of the worlds', or to be ever praised (*Luqman*: 12), expresses a hyperbole of the meaning of praise. It may be used as an agent noun or objective. Here, it means that Allah is worthy of all praises. It comes after the attribute 'self-sufficient' (*Luqman*: 12) which denotes that if a disbeliever knows that Allah does not deprive him of His favour in spite of his disbelief, he will recognise His Lordship, for such Divine forbearance and tolerance are worthy of praise, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلِذِ قَالَ لَقَمَنُ لِبَنِيهِ ۖ وَهُوَ يَعِظُهُ ۚ يَبْنَىٰ لَا تُشْرِكْ
بِاللَّهِ ۖ إِنَّ الشِّرْكَ لَظُلْمٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٣﴾

Luqman counselled his son, 'My son, do not attribute any partners to God: attributing partners to Him is a terrible wrong' [13] (The Quran, *Luqman*: 13)

The Lord *the Most High* gives us a glimpse of Luqman's wisdom as mentioned in the Quran: 'and Luqman spoke thus unto his son, admonishing him' (*Luqman*: 13). The introductory sentence 'And' calls Prophet Muhammad to mention the wise account of Luqman *peace be upon him* with his son. In fact, the wisdom and advice of Luqman were aimed to offer guidance to his son.

They prove that he used to give legal opinions and spiritual counsel to people before the time of Dawud (David). Once Dawud (David) became a prophet, Luqman ceased to assume those responsibilities in the community. He said, 'I should now stop, for a more qualified person has undertaken my role.' He then restricted his advice to his beloved son. This elucidates Abu Hanifa's response⁽¹⁾ to Justice Ibn Abu Laylah *Allah be pleased with him*⁽²⁾ who complained to the caliph of Abu Hanifa. Ibn Abu Laylah accused Abu Hanifa of discrediting his judgments and claims. The caliph sent a word that Abu Hanifa should stop issuing legal opinions. Then, while home, his daughter came to him and said, 'Father, this and that happened to me (she was asking for a legal opinion)?' He said, 'Ask your brother Hammad. Indeed, the caliph has prohibited me from issuing legal opinions.' There is a difference between how someone speaks to common people and how he speaks to his son. A father's love for a son is such that the father's only wishes are that his son excels him and avoid his own mistakes.

Allah *the Most High* says: 'admonishing him' (*Luqman*: 13). Admonition is to remind of well-known thing lest a person may forget it. In reference to new information or directives, you cannot give an admonishment concerning them. Indeed, admonition only recalls past things to alert attention. Therefore, there is difference between a teacher and a preacher who admonishes. Admonishing one's son implies that he is already well acquainted with the issues concerning that which he is being reminded. His father's role is to jog his memory and stimulate him to think. Contemplating the style of the verse, we notice that Allah *the Almighty* informs us about Luqman *peace be upon him* by saying, 'And Luqman spoke thus unto his son' (*Luqman*: 13). When Luqman addressed his son, he said, 'O, my dear son' (*Luqman*: 13). He did not just say, 'Son!' Rather, he said, 'My dear son'. It is reminiscent of how one calls a young child out of tenderness for him. Perhaps the use of this gentle term conveys a very subtle message to his son: Indeed, you are still in need of my advice. By

(1) *The story of Imam Abu Hanifa with the judge Ibn Abu Laylah.*

(2) He is Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Rahman ibn Abu Layla Al-Ansari of Kufa (74-148 AH). He was a judge and jurist. For about thirty-three years, he was the judge of Kufa during the reign of the Umayyad Caliphate and the early years of Abbasid dynasty. He had some famous accounts with Abu Hanifa and others. See Al-Zirikli, *Al-A'lam*, 6: 189; Al-Dhahabi, *Tadhkirat Al-Hufazh*, 1: 171.

no means should you figure that because you have grown, married and started a life of your own, that you are no longer in need of me.

The first admonishment the father offered the son was ‘Do not ascribe Divine powers to aught besides Allah’ (*Luqman*: 13). This is the apex of creed and most important to begin with. *Luqman* *peace be upon him* wanted to correct any misgivings his son might have about existence and turn his attention to the fact that the things which were enjoyed by his father and grandfathers are still enriching the environment. It is quite remarkable that these things remain. They continue to enrich despite the fact that the one to whom they were given—and who initially benefitted from them—has long passed away.

Consider how long it has been since Allah created the earth and how many generations of human beings have benefitted from the sun. Nevertheless, all those people have now passed away, but the sun remains as it has always been. In fact, the same could be said of the moon, air, mountains, etc. Indeed, the human being is the steward of creation. Nonetheless, even though it is at your service, it will outlast you. Therefore, it is primarily the responsibility of intelligent human beings, whom Allah honours over other created beings, to say, ‘I must have a life span, which exceeds that of the various elements in creation that serve me. The only possible way to attain this end is to connect human life span in this world with that of the Hereafter.’ Pondering this reality summons one to have faith in Allah and refrain from ascribing Divine power to anything besides Him. He is the Creator of these things for you, and He is the One Who prepared them for your service before you existed. Allah says: ‘[All] of this is Allah’s creation. Show me, then, what others [than He] may have created!’ (*Luqman*: 11)

How dare anyone declare that Allah had partners in originating the creation? Those claimed to be Allah’s partners have never claimed to be gods or created anything from nothing. How can you make such a fatuous claim when you walk in the desert, observe a stone that pleases you, take it, shape it and mould it into God? If the wind blew vigorously, it would carry your ‘god’ away! What are the ways of these gods, namely their commands and prohibitions? What type of reward have they prepared for those who worship them in earnest? What punishment have they prepared for those who disbelieve in them? These gods declare no accountability. The very essence of worship

is located in a worshipper's obeying of the command of his worshipped Lord. In the absence of accountability, these are but 'false gods'. In truth, this falsity is very clear to anyone with sound mind.

As such, Luqman *peace be upon him* said, '...such [a false] ascribing of Divinity is indeed a tremendous wrong!' (*Luqman*: 13) Associating partners with Allah is but a particular strain of the larger concept of *zhulm* (wrongdoing). Indeed, the precise meaning of *zhulm* is to give what rightly belongs to one party to an undeserving party. The height or perhaps the depth of this type of wrongdoing is to divest Allah of His right. Subsequently, you give it to someone besides Him. Have you not observed that the companions of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* were disconcerted when the following verse was revealed,⁽¹⁾ 'those who believe and have not polluted their faith with associating partners with Allah; they will have security, and they are guided.' (*al-Anfal*: 62) They said, 'O, Messenger of Allah, who amongst us has never obscured his faith by committing an act of wrongdoing?' The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* then proceeded to calm their disquietude and ease their discomfort by informing them that the wrongdoing intended in the verse is the most egregious act of wrongdoing, associating Divine power to other than Allah *the Most High*: 'such [a false] ascribing of Divinity is indeed a tremendous wrong!' (*Luqman*: 13)

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ وَهَنَا عَلَى وَهْنٍ وَفَصَّلَهُ
فِي عَامَيْنِ أَنْ أَشْكُرَ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيْكَ إِلَى الْمَصِيرِ ﴿١٤﴾

**We have commanded people to be good to their parents:
their mothers carried them, with strain upon strain, and it
takes two years to wean them. Give thanks to Me and to
your parents – all will return to Me [14]
(The Quran, *Luqman*: 14)**

This statement is either a part of Luqman's advice to his son or a new introductory idea that came as a comment concerning the advices of Luqman.

(1) *Al-Bukhari, Sahih, (Hadith Number: 4776); Muslim, Sahih, (Hadith Number: 124), Kitab Al-Iman, from 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud.*

The strongest opinion⁽¹⁾ is that the Lord *the Most High* is introducing a new idea. For evidence, they cite the subsequent verse as follows: ‘Yet, should they endeavour to make you ascribe Divinity, side by side with Me, to something which your mind cannot accept [as Divine], obey them not’ (*Luqman*: 15).

Thus, it was an honour to *Luqman peace be upon him* that Allah *the Almighty* inserted these instructions after his many pieces of advice to his son. The way Allah mentions them makes it seem as if they are part of his advice.

- ‘We have enjoined’ (*Luqman*: 14) which means that Allah instructs mankind and reminds them about their own welfare and happiness. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* addressed people during the Farewell Sermon.⁽²⁾ He mentioned the principal religious virtues. He selected this topic because it was the last opportunity he would get to address them. He did not have an occasion to mention all the details of religious practice. Thus, he was content to mention the most salient features of faith. It is akin to a dying father gathering his children and offering them some parting advice; it goes without saying that he will select only the most important matters and speak as specifically as possible.

(1) It is said that this was a part of *Luqman*'s advice to his son and Allah just narrated what he said. This means that he said to his son, ‘Do not ascribe divinity to anything besides Allah and do not obey your parents if they order you to falsely ascribe divine power to something besides Allah. Yet, Allah has commanded that they be obeyed in anything that does not entail polytheism or disobedience to Him the Most High.

It is also said *Luqman* mentioned to his son that he should not ascribe divinity to anything besides Allah and Allah then enjoined every human being to honour his parents. Al-Qurtubi quoted these two opinions (7/5320) from Al-Qushayri. He added that the preferable view is that these two verses were revealed concerning Sa’d ibn Abu Waqqas.

(2) *In his Farewell address, the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, 'O, people, verily your blood and property is sacred and will be until you meet your Lord. Their sacredness is like this day and this month—that you venerate and honour so faithfully. Indeed, you will meet your Lord, and He will question you concerning your actions. Verily, I have conveyed the message. Whoever is in possession of a trust, let him fulfil it and return to the one by whom he was entrusted. The interest accrued on all past transactions is now void; however, you are entitled to the principal sums of those transactions. Do not oppress others, and you will not be oppressed.'* See Ibn Hisham, *Al-Sirah Al-Nabawiyah*, 4: 603-604.

Allah *the Most High* says: 'We have enjoined upon man goodness towards his parents' (*Luqman*: 14). Instruction about filial servitude and loyalty is given significant attention within the Quran. Yet, in this verse we are given the reason why filial servitude and loyalty is afforded its significance: 'his mother bore him by bearing strain upon strain, and his weaning lasted two years' (*Luqman*: 14). Five Quranic verses on filial servitude and loyalty mention the word 'good' as follows:

- 'And lo! We accepted this solemn pledge from [you,] the Children of Israel: "You shall worship none but Allah, and you shall do good unto your parents.'" (*al-Baqara*: 83)
- 'Worship Allah [alone] and do not ascribe divinity, in any way, in aught beside Him. And do the good unto your parents.' (*an-Nisa*: 36)
- 'Say: "Come, let me convey unto you what Allah has [really] forbidden unto you: 'Do not ascribe divinity to, in any way, to aught beside Him, and [do not offend against but, rather,] do good unto your parents'"' (*al-An'am*: 151).
- 'For your Lord has ordained that you shall worship none but Him. And do good unto [thy] parents' (*al-Isra*: 23).
- 'Now [amongst the best of the deeds which] We have enjoined upon man [to be] good towards his parents. In pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give him birth; and her bearing him and his weaning took thirty months' (*al-Ahqaf*: 15).
- In the twenty-ninth verse of the chapter of *al-'Ankabut*, the word 'goodness' (*husn*) is used to describe the treatment of parents: 'Now [amongst the best of righteous deeds which] We have enjoined upon man [is] goodness towards his parents.' (*al-'Ankabut*: 8)

Only the verse in question enjoins filial servitude and loyalty without the use of either the words goodness (*husn*) or good (*ihsan*). Nevertheless, what is the difference between *husn* and *ihsan*? The word *ihsan* is the verbal noun of the verb *ahsana* which means to make good. For instance, you would say,

'So-and-so does this or that excellently (*ahsana*).'¹ *Husn* (goodness), on the other hand, is the verbal noun of the verb *hasuna* which means to be inherently good. *Husn* is the original root of all related derivatives. When you say, 'So-and-so acts justly', you describe him with the attribute of justice. However, when you want to elaborate, you say, 'So- and-so is just.' In the latter case, you have mentioned justice as a quality inherent in his being, not simply a description of his actions.

As such, *husn* (goodness) conveys a stronger meaning than *ihsan* (good). Why does goodness then occur in the verse of 'Now [among the best of righteous deeds which] We have enjoined upon man [is] goodness towards his parents' (*al-'Ankabut*: 8)? Many have mentioned that this verse addresses a very difficult area. It touches upon the essence of our creed: how does a son respond to his parents if they command him to ascribe Divinity to something other than Allah? This explains why it was required that Allah *the Exalted* reminds the son that He has enjoined goodness upon him towards his parents. At the place where he wanted to convey the most expressive meaning, He did not say *ihsan* (good). Rather, he says, 'goodness'. Allah *the Almighty* stresses a son's duty to his parents in this very illustrative language to help him realise that their calling him to associate partners with Him is not a license to mistreat or abandon them. Allah *the Exalted* instructs us, 'obey them not, but [even then] behave with them in this world's life with kindness...' (*Luqman*: 15).

This is a general order to show kindness to parents. However, the order specifically deals with the role of motherhood: 'His mother bore him by bearing strain upon strain, and his weaning lasted two years' (*Luqman*: 14). He did not mention anything about the role of fathers. Why is this? In response, some said that it is your responsibility to put your intellect and heart to work in order to arrive at its detailed conclusions. Here, Allah *the Most High* makes a point to make a particular mention of a mother's role. She sacrifices a great deal for you while you are young and unable to recognise her sacrifices. The favour she confers upon you is hidden from you. As for a father's sacrifices, you see them when you are mature, obtaining the ability to understand the world around you. Most sons acknowledge the things their fathers provide for them.

Fathers' sacrifices mostly occur after maturity when intellectual ripeness is complete. Therefore, a child recognises what his father does for him. On many occasions, he hears, 'Your father has gone off to do this or that (for your sake)' or 'Your father brought this for you' or 'When your father arrives, such-and-such will happen.' Indeed, the role of fathers is quite different from the role of mothers. A father's role is obvious. Accordingly, the Lord *the Most High* mentions a mother's role: 'His mother bore him by bearing strain upon strain' (*Luqman*: 14). Some wondered, is not the child the outcome of an act shared by a mother and a father. Are not they equal? 'Certainly,' we would respond. However, the hardship that mothers bears in pregnancy and labour is more observable. If Allah *the Almighty* would not have attached procreation to sensual gratification, people would have engaged in sexual intercourse sparingly. In that case, mothers would not have been willing to endure the hardship of child bearing, and fathers would not have been willing to endure the responsibility of a family.

We all are aware of the story of the woman who raised a case before the courts because her husband attempted to deprive her of her custody rights. After she addressed the court, the judge asked her, 'Is not this child both of yours?' She then responded, 'Of course, he is. Yet, he carried him when he was weightless and released him with pleasure and delight. I, on the other hand, carried him while he was a burden.' The judge ruled in her favour.

The meaning of 'strain upon strain' (*Luqman*: 14) is weakness upon weakness. Women are purely the gentler sex. The inherent gentleness of women is combined with additional hardship whose source is the foetus that is deriving nourishment from them. Day after day, the foetus grows inside the womb. Allah *the Almighty* wisely created the womb with elasticity and expandability; it can contain the foetus during the various stages of pregnancy until it reaches a size at which its continued growth is no longer possible inside. At this point, the womb pushes the baby out. Allah *the Most High* says: 'We bring [all] this into being as a new creation. Blessed, therefore, is Allah, the best of creators!' (*al-Mu'minun*: 14)

The foetus is entirely dependent on the mother for nourishment, breathing and movement. Nevertheless, when the order of Allah is issued, He decrees

the birth of that child and brings him forth as a new creation, providing him with all essentials for survival. He is no longer part of the mother. This process of travails is like the explosion of balloons; you cannot inflate it with more air than it can hold. It is nothing short of a wonder of Allah that the womb expands to the point of containing twins, triplets, quadruplets, etc. as we often witness. The fact that the provision of the child is independent of that of its mother is a manifestation of the greatness of the Creator. Each of them has their own provision. Neither of them can infringe upon the provision of the other. As soon as a woman is destined to conceive a child, there is a cessation in her menstrual cycle. This very blood forms the principal source of nourishment for the new child.

Before birth, a woman's body rejects this blood monthly without benefiting from it. Why is this? Indeed, the blood is not there for her nourishment. Seemingly, the Creator informs us that each of us has a provision. None shall encroach upon that which has been assigned to someone else. Additionally, another sign of the Divine wise plan in placing the foetus in the stomach of a mother is that it comes out with head first. Healthy children are borne in this natural way. Indeed, the first of life's demands that the new-born must confront as soon as it separates from its mother is to breathe. The baby's head comes out of the birth canal during delivery to help him breathe. Specialists of the field of obstetrics/gynaecology attempt to ensure that, even if the birth is difficult. If it comes out oppositely, he may suffer shock and die.

The Lord says, 'his weaning two years' (*Luqman*: 14). *Fisal*, namely weaning, refers to the period after a child completes the nursing phase. On the basis of the same linguistic root, a young camel that is no longer dependent on the milk of its mother is called '*faseel*', or a young camel that can eat and live without his mother's care. Ironically, weaning children is difficult for both children and mothers. Parents share the sexual intercourse that produces a child. In light of this, we must acknowledge that the mother enjoys a larger role in the life of the children and carries a weightier burden than that of fathers in terms of rearing. This explains why she received a greater mention in the advice of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. One of his Companions once asked, 'Who is worthiest of my good companionship, O, Messenger of Allah?' He responded, 'Your mother (he repeated it three

times) and then your father.⁽¹⁾ In this, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* gave each of them in accordance with their sacrifices.

- The Quran sets out the issue of weaning in other verses: 'The [divorced] mothers may nurse their children for two whole years for those, if they wish to complete the period of nursing' (*al-Baqara*: 233). The verse in question asserts this point: 'his weaning lasted two years.' (*Luqman*: 14)
- Another verse combines the length of time spent in pregnancy and the subsequent nursing period: 'Her bearing him and his weaning took thirty months' (*al-Ahqaf*: 15). Subtracting two years from thirty months leaves us six months only. This is the shortest time for a successful pregnancy.

'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* depended on this reasoning, while the opinion of 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* was that the relevant punishment of adultery should be implemented to a woman⁽²⁾ who gave birth six months after marriage. Indeed, his reasoning was that pregnancy requires nine months. Indeed, 'Ali mentioned to 'Umar, 'O, Commander of the faithful, Allah mentions otherwise!' Then he said to 'Umar the above two verses: ⁽³⁾ 'Her bearing him and his weaning took thirty months' (*al-Ahqaf*: 15) and 'his weaning lasted two years' (*Luqman*: 14). Looking at these two verses, 'Ali could conclude that the six months was an acceptable time for pregnancy. Upon this, 'Umar remarked, 'Unfortunate indeed is a place without Abu Al-Hasan.'⁽⁴⁾

(1) *Al-Bukhari, Sahih, (Hadith Number: 5971); Muslim, Sahih, (Hadith Number: 2548) in Kitab Al-Birr was-Sila. It is narrated from Abu Hurayra.*

(2) *The story of the woman who gave birth after six months*

(3) *Ibn Katheer, Tafsir, 4: 157.*

(4) *Al-Hakim, Mustadrak, (Hadith Number: 1/457); Al-Bayhaqi, Shu'ab Al-Iman, from Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri Allah be pleased with him. He said, 'We made the pilgrimage with 'Umar. Once he had performed his circumambulations and kissed the black stone. 'Umar then said, "I know that a stone has neither the power to harm or benefit me." This is the beginning of a long Hadith in which "Umar Allah be pleased with him is narrated to have said, 'I seek refuge with Allah the Most High from ever living in a place that you are not present Abu Al-Hasan.' This was after 'Ali said, 'No, indeed, it does harm and benefit! On the Day of Judgment, will it not bear witness for those who kissed it?'*

Allah *the Most High* then says, '[Hence, O, man,] be grateful towards Me and towards your parents, [and remember that] with Me is all journeys' end' (*Luqman*: 14). Gratefulness is due to Allah first, for He is the Creator from nothing and the One Who sustains all living beings. Then, gratefulness is due to parents who are the immediate cause of child birth and subsequent growth. The Lord is the ultimate source and cause of creation. His creative act occurs *ex nihilo* and that parents are a means to accomplish this end. You can only prove being grateful to the ultimate cause when you thank your parents. Indeed, they are the secondary cause of your existence.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says, '[Hence, O, man,] be grateful towards me and towards your parents, [and remember that] with Me is all journeys' end' (*Luqman*: 14) is a particular reference to the gratefulness that should be shown to Allah and then to parents for your creation. Nonetheless, in a different place we read: 'Say: "O, my Lord! Bestow your grace upon them, even as they cherished and reared me when I was a child!"' (*al-Isra*': 24) Show gratitude for them, for they form the immediate cause of your existence, education and upbringing. This alludes to a type of biological paternity and another type which is the outcome of raising and rearing a child. Instances in which someone other than the biological parents rears a child are not rare. Accordingly, as much as Allah has stated the reason for filial servitude and loyalty, 'Say: "O, my Lord! Bestow your grace upon them, even as they cherished and reared me when I was a child!"' (*al-Isra*': 24), those who fulfil this role must be afforded the same standard of gratitude, loyalty and kindness. The well-known Islamic legal maxim offers the following wisdom: 'The reason for performing an action and the action itself are inseparable; whenever the reason is present the action follows, and whenever it is absent, the action is not performed.' Thus, if the biological father is not present, the one who was responsible for the child stands for the parent. This surrogate father is to be shown kindness, gratitude and love equal to a biological father. In fact, a surrogate father should have more kindness. Simply, there is a natural impetus—to take care of your own physical offspring—that drives a biological father to care for his children. A surrogate father, on the other hand, is only motivated by his religious responsibility and compassion. This issue is entirely different; it is not one simply of paternity.

Now, are you commanded to show gratefulness to Allah first as a way to show gratefulness to parents who are the immediate causes of your existence? Or are you to show gratefulness to parents first as a way to show gratefulness to Allah, the Creator? We would offer them together. Showing gratefulness to Allah entails showing gratefulness to parents and vice versa. Allah *the Almighty* then says, 'with Me is all journeys' end' (*Luqman*: 14) which means that the ultimate end lies with Him. In other words, I command you, so be careful and never violate My orders. Or else, I can punish those who violate my orders. Allah *Glorified is He* says,⁽¹⁾

وَلَا تَجْهَدَكَ عَلَىٰ أَنْ تُشْرِكَ بِي مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ فَلَا تُطِعْهُمَا
وَصَاحِبَهُمَا فِي الدُّنْيَا مَعْرُوفًا وَاتَّبِعْ سَبِيلَ مَنْ أَنَابَ إِلَيَّ ثُمَّ إِلَيَّ
مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

**If they strive to make you associate with Me any- thing
about which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them.**

**Yet keep their company in this life according to what is
right, and follow the path of those who turn to Me. You will
all return to Me in the end, and I will tell you everything
that you have done [15] (The Quran, *Luqman*: 15)**

Allah *the Exalted* stresses the issue of gratefulness to one's parents leaving no excuse for anyone. A companion was questioning the Messenger of Allah

(1) Concerning the occasion of this verse, Sa'd ibn Abu Waqqas said, 'I was a very dutiful son to my mother. When I embraced Islam, she said to me, "O Sa'd, what is this you have decided to do? I swear, I will not eat or drink until you give up this new religion." She would continue rebuking me. It even came to be said that I was killing my mother. At this, I said, "O, my dear mother, do not do this to yourself, for indeed, there is nothing that could make me consider giving up my faith." Afterward, she went the first day without eating. Then, she awoke and continued her self-imposed hunger for another day and night. By now, I could tell that this was really beginning to wear on her. When I saw this, I said, "O, my dear mother, by Allah, you can be assured that even when you pass away and the soul departs the body, I will not relinquish my faith. The choice is yours. You can choose to eat or you can choose to starve yourself." When she heard this, she ate. It was after this occasion that the verse was revealed.' See As-Suyuti, *Al-Durr Al-Manthur*, 6: 521. He attributed it to Abu Ya'ala, Al-Tabrani, Ibn Mardawayh, and Ibn 'Asakir from Abu 'Uthman Al-Nahdi.

peace and blessings be upon him about this issue. What shall I do to show them gratefulness if they actively call me to disbelief? Do I obey them? Such was the context in which the verse in question was revealed.

In the verse of chapter *al-Ankabut*, we read: ‘Now [amongst the best of righteous deeds which] We have enjoined upon man is goodness towards his parents. Yet [even so,] should they endeavour to make you ascribe Divinity, side by side with Me, to something which your mind cannot accept [as divine], obey them not. For it is unto Me that you all must return, whereupon I shall make you [truly] understand [the right and wrong of] all that you were doing [in life]’ (*al-’Ankabut*: 8).

- We find the word 'goodness' (*husn*) mentioned; it does not say, ‘but [even then] behave with them in this world's life with kindness’ (*Luqman*: 15). The word *husn* is all-inclusive of forms of good and gentle kindness; it includes good company and other types of good treatment.
- ‘Yet, should they endeavour to’ (*Luqman*: 15). The Arabic term *jahad* is to strive for a personal aim, whereas the term *jaahada* is to compete with another person for a goal, or in other words a mutual strife. It is common to say, 'So-and-so is competing (*jaahada*) with so-and-so.' We use this term in the same way we use the term *qaatal* to indicate a mutual fight. Indeed, the linguistic patterns of these verbs indicate the collective action. This general rule can also be observed in the sentence: Zayd and ‘Amr shared (*sharaka*) in this or that. The use of this verb indicates that each of them takes part in the action. Nevertheless, in all likelihood, one of them takes a more active role, while the other was passive.

Thus, Allah's statement, ‘Yet should they endeavour to’ (*Luqman*: 15), should not be taken to mean that if they gently exhort you to ascribe Divinity to an entity besides Allah, they spare no effort and energy in their attempt to coerce you to join them in polytheism, My command to you is ‘obey them not’ (*Luqman*: 15). Yet, after you refuse to acquiesce to their wishes, this should not be a reason to treat them unkindly or sever your ties with them.

Even in their state of blatant disbelief, they are still afforded the privilege that Allah *the Most High* mentions in the verse, 'but [even then] behave with them in this world's life with kindness' (*Luqman*: 15). Actuality, they have disbelieved in Me. Yet, I am still commanding kindness to them.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says, 'And follow the path of those who turn towards me' (*Luqman*: 15). It asserts that you will never be alone. Indeed, there are many people who are penitent and constant in turning to Allah. Join them, for Allah says, 'In the end, unto Me you all must return' (*Luqman*: 15) which means that the ultimate return of all will be to Me.

Many scholars say that this verse refers to *Sa'ad ibn Abi Waqqas*,⁽¹⁾ the companion whom Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Sa'ad is my uncle, so let anyone show me an uncle finer than he is!'⁽²⁾ When Sa'ad embraced Islam, his mother was angered.⁽³⁾ She had a deep love for her son; in fact, his embracing Islam nearly drove her to insanity, and she vowed to refrain from eating, drinking, bathing and to go stark raving naked under the intense heat of the sun until he recanted his religious conversion. When Sa'ad learnt of this, he said, 'Leave her alone. By Allah, if hunger begins to set in, she will eat. If her thirst becomes unbearable, she will drink. If she is afflicted with lice, she will bathe. As for me, I will never abandon the religion I have accepted.' Then, the verse: 'Yet, should they endeavour to...' (*Luqman*: 15) was revealed.

Should a disbeliever who actively strives to mislead believers, whether their sons or others, so that believers may join them in disbelief, were they to

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- (1) *The story of the mother of Sa'ad Ibn Abu Waqqas and how she was upset by his conversion to Islam*
 - (2) *This Prophetic Hadith was mentioned by Ibn Hajar Al-'Asqalani in Al-Isaba (entry no. 3187). He sourced it to At-Tirmidhi from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Jabir who said, 'Sa'ad approached the Messenger of God peace and blessings be upon him who said, "Sa'ad is my uncle, so let anyone show me an uncle finer than he is!" This Prophetic Hadith was also narrated by Hakim in his Mustadrak (3/498), concerning it, he said, 'This Prophetic Hadith is authentic upon the criteria of Al-Bukhari and Muslim, but neither of them narrated it.' Ibn Sa'ad also narrated this Prophetic Hadith in At-Tabaqat (3/128).*
 - (3) *She is Himna bint Sufyan ibn Umayya. In Al-Isaba fi Tamyiz As-Sahaba (entry no. 3187 in biographical entry of her son Sa'ad) Ibn Hajar wrote: 'She was the paternal cousin of Abu Sufyan ibn Harb ibn Umayya.'*

knew that Allah *Glorified is He* enjoined that such a disbeliever father or mother should still be treated with respect in spite of his opposition to the truth, they would know for certain that He is merciful onto them and does not deserve their attitude of denial and rejection.

Previously, we mentioned the Qudsi Hadith in which the earth said, 'O, Lord, permit me to cave in while the sons of Adam (human beings) dwell upon me. Indeed, they have availed themselves of the sustenance You provide to them, but failed to thank You.' The sky, then, said, 'O, Lord, permit me to fall to pieces upon the sons of Adam. Indeed, they have availed themselves of the sustenance You provide to them, but failed to thank You.' Then, the seas said, 'O, Lord, permit us to drown the sons of Adam. Indeed, they have availed themselves of the sustenance You provide to them, but failed to thank You.' This continued throughout the other elements of creation until the True Lord *Glorified is He* said to them, 'If you created the sons of Adam, you would have mercy upon them.'⁽¹⁾

The reason for this is that they are the servants and the created beings of Allah. Have you ever witnessed an originator, or an inventor of something, senselessly smash their invention to bits. In addition, there is a Prophetic Hadith saying: 'Allah is more pleased at the repentance of His servant than one of you would be if he fortuitously found his camel which he thought had lost in a deserted land.'⁽²⁾

(1) *This Qudsi Hadith was cited by Imam Al-Ghazali in Ihya 'Ulum Ad-Din (4/52). As a saying of some of the pious predecessors (As-Salaf) it was worded in the following manner: 'There is not a single servant of Allah that acts disobediently without the place he is standing on earth asking permission to cave in around him. Likewise, the sky requests permission to fall to pieces upon him. However, Allah Glorified is He says to the earth and heavens, 'Refrain from harming My servant and leave him to his own devices for now. Indeed, neither of you created him. If you were responsible for his creation, you would deal with him mercifully. Perhaps, he will repent unto Me, and I will forgive him. Or perhaps he will seek to replace his misdeeds with good deeds, and I will grant him that which he seeks.'*

(2) *The authenticity of this Hadith is undisputed. It was narrated by Imam Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (6309) and likewise by Muslim in his Sahih (2747). Within the collections of both, the Hadith is narrated on the authority of Anas ibn Malik; however, the version that Muslim has narrated is as follows: 'Allah is more pleased at His penitent servant (as he repents) than one of you would be if he were in an unfamiliar land, abandoned=*

How great is our Lord!

It is narrated⁽¹⁾ that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was visited by a stranger; however, he recognised that he carried himself differently than did believers at that time. When Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* questioned him about his beliefs, he revealed that he was a fire-worshipper. Upon hearing this, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* slammed the door in his face, and the man promptly went away. Allah *the Almighty* then admonished His prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) concerning the way he had dealt with the stranger; He said, 'O, Ibrahim (Abraham), must he allow you to turn him from his religion in order to be worthy of being hosted for a single night. Although he disbelieves in Me, I have provided for him throughout his life.'

Afterward, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* rushed behind the man until he caught up with him. Upon reaching him, Ibrahim (Abraham) informed him of how Allah *the Almighty* had admonished him for his earlier behaviour. The man then said, 'How great is your Lord! He admonishes those whom He loves on account of His enemies.' The man then accepted the testimony of faith in the One True Allah.

If a disbeliever who desires that others join them in disbelief knew that, in spite of their disbelief, Allah *the Exalted* has still commanded that they be treated with respect and kindness, they should return to the fold of the faith in Him. This explains our advice to the adherents of other religious traditions who admire and eventually choose Islam, but thereby earn the contempt of their families. We say to them, 'Persist in the practice of your new faith and be more devoted and kinder to your family than you were before you embraced Islam. If you can do this, you will have forced them to recognise the good qualities of your religion. Thus, you should double your devotion and benevolence towards them. This will help to soften their hearts and gently make them incline towards your faith.'

= *by the mount which is carrying his only food and drink. In despair about his fate, he sits beneath a tree lamenting about his lost mount. Then, he notices that the camel is beside him. He quickly seizes the camel and after he tethers it, he is taken by such rapturous joy that he screams out, "O, Allah, You are my servant, and I am your Lord." His seemingly blasphemous effusion is the result of the intensity of his joy.'*

(1) *The story of the guest of Ibrahim (Abraham) peace be upon him with his disbelieving guest.*

Contemplate the sublimity of the style being employed in the holy statement: '...behave with them in this world's life with kindness...' (*Luqman*: 15); the verse did not say: 'give them kind treatment'. Rather, it makes kindness an outcome of behaving kindly to them. This entails that one should look after them and routinely check on them. A son is obligated to know the needs of his parents and should fulfil them before they ask. Indeed, he is careful not to expose them to the inherent humiliation that is associated with asking something of someone. This level of attentiveness to the needs of one's parents is itself a tremendous show of goodness towards them.

It is like the man ⁽¹⁾ who heard a knocking at his door. He answered it and found a friend of his who secretly confided in him that he needed some help. The man entered his home and promptly fulfilled his friend's need; nevertheless, when he entered his home, he burst into tears. When his wife came and asked him why he was weeping when, in fact, he did fulfil the need of his friend, he replied to her, 'I am crying due to my failure to check on his situation. I was not able to provide for his need before he was forced to humiliate himself by asking me.'

When the True Lord *the Most High* mentions, '...In the end, unto to Me you all must return: and thereupon I shall make you [truly] understand all that you were doing [in life].' (*Luqman*: 15), after the command to observe filial servitude and loyalty, it serves a purpose. Indeed, He is making us aware that filial servitude and loyalty, along with behaving well towards parents with goodness are not things which will be forgotten; on the contrary, they will be recorded as good deeds for your favour. In other words, on the Day of Judgment, they will be placed on the scale which weighs your good deeds. Their weight will be that of obeying Allah's order and command. Indeed, because you chose to perform that which you were commanded, you will receive your reward, and how could it be otherwise, you performed an act of faith; you must be commended for it.

(1) *The story of the man whose friend had a request*

يَبْنَىٰ إِنَّهَا إِنْ تَكُ مِثْقَالَ حَبَّةٍ مِّنْ خَرْدَلٍ فَتَكُنْ فِي صَخْرَةٍ أَوْ
 فِي السَّمَوَاتِ أَوْ فِي الْأَرْضِ يَأْتِ بِهَا اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَطِيفٌ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١٦﴾

[And Luqman continued], ‘My son, if even the weight of a mustard seed were hidden in a rock or anywhere in the heavens or earth, God would bring it [to light], for He is all subtle and All-Aware [16] (The Quran, *Luqman*: 16)

'O, my dear son,' he [Luqman] continued. ...' (*Luqman*: 16): Again, we notice that Luqman *peace be upon him* is calling his son by a term of endearment. Next, we turn our attention to the following part of the verse: '...Verily, though there be aught of that is the weight of a mustard-seed...' (*Luqman*: 16). In this verse, Luqman *peace be upon him* wants to instruct his son about an attribute of the True Lord *the Most High*. It is the attribute of absolute knowledge; it is the Knowledge from which nothing escapes or is hidden. It is as if he is saying to his son, 'By no means should you be given to the idea that what eludes people also eludes Allah *Glorified is He*: "How could it be that He Who has created [all] should not know [all]? Yes, He alone is unfathomable [in His Wisdom], All-Aware!" (*al-Mulk*: 14)

In the same way that not even something weighing a mustard seed, even if it were hidden inside of a rock or in the sky or even buried deep in the earth, eludes the knowledge of Allah; good deeds and bad deeds, no matter how subtle, also fail to elude Him in the slightest. Whatever effort the one performing the deed makes to conceal, it makes no difference at all.

We previously said that the orientalist argued the issue of Allah's intimate knowledge of everything in His creation as particularly expressed by the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Verily, He knows all that is said openly, just as He [alone] knows all that you would conceal.' (*al-Anbiya*: 110) They said, 'The knowledge of what you conceal is one special ability of Allah. We are willing to grant that. However, how is there anything special about Allah's Knowledge of what is said openly? Is this not obvious to everyone?'

We responded that Allah *the Exalted* in His statement, 'Verily, He knows all that is said openly, just as He [alone] knows all that you would conceal.' (*al-Anbiya*: 110), is not addressing a person; quite the opposite is true; He is

addressing a group, collectively. This means that He knows all that is said openly by a group of people at one time. Previously, we gave an example for this by a public demonstration. Thousands of people converge on one place, speaking in different voices and shouting different slogans; yet, some might be saying things which are punishable by law. Given the veritable cacophony of voices that are in that place, could you even attempt to distinguish one from the other and correctly pinpoint the source of each statement?

Of course, it goes without saying that you would not be able to do such a feat despite the fact that we are only asking you to decipher statements which are being made openly. On the other hand, Allah *the Almighty* knows every single word that is mentioned; He knows who spoke each word, and He is able to isolate every word and identify its source. Accordingly, we can conclude that knowledge of what is said openly, in the truest sense, is also rightfully considered the special ability of Allah. In fact, the knowledge of what is said openly is more impressive and far-reaching than even that of what is concealed.

The verse mentioned '...the weight of a mustard-seed ...' (*Luqman*: 16) because, at that time, it was the smallest thing that could be readily identified, and people used it as a unit of measurement to represent minuteness. However, this does not imply that in the present age you would be justified in saying, 'Is a mustard-seed the smallest thing in existence?' The Quran mentioned it as an example of minuteness because it is appropriate to the level of knowledge of the people living at the time during the revelation of the Quran. In terms of verification, the Quran does mention the atom and even alludes to particles that are smaller in size than those in it at other places.

For this reason, when they invented the particle accelerator in Germany, they were able to split the atom. Many believed that the findings uncovered by this process opened the Quran to new criticisms. However, the Quran does mention the atom; in fact, it made it a religious measurement for the human actions. Indeed, Allah says: 'And so, he who shall have done an atom's weight of good shall behold it, and he who shall have done an atom's weight of evil shall behold it.' (*az-Zalzala*: 7-8) Within these two verses, the Quran does not mention anything smaller than the atom; it is well known that a part of something is smaller than its whole.

We also would like to point out (to those who are eager to impugn the provenance of the Quran): Indeed, you have read some things, but many others have eluded you. If you possessed thorough knowledge of the Word of Allah, you would know that it has contained enough precautions against the false conclusion you have arrived at as well as those that you might arrive at in the future. Read, if you will, Allah's statement about the atom: '...and neither is there anything smaller than that, or larger, but is recorded in [His] clear decree.' (*Yunus*: 61) We can even say that the Quranic precaution is compound. Allah does not say small (*saghir*); rather, He says smaller (*asghar*); this means that the Word of Allah presages the discovery of every particle the atom is composed of.

And '...though it be [hidden] in a rock, or in the skies, or in the earth, Allah will bring it to light ...' (*Luqman*: 16). As for the portion which reads, '...and though it be [hidden] in a rock ...', this means that despite the utterly complicating interlacing of the elements of the universe and even such a seed of mustard is in the most confined place. '...or in the skies, or in the earth ...' it refers to the vastness that has no limitation. In essence, what is being asserted is that nothing escapes Allah: neither in an extremely constricted place, nor in the vastness of earth and space. '...Allah will bring it to light ...' because He *the Most High* has the characteristics enabling Him to do so: '...for behold, Allah is unfathomable [in His Wisdom], All-Aware.' (*Luqman*: 16)

Allah combines both of these characteristics because one could be aware of something and possess knowledge of where to find it but be incapable of reaching it as it is located in a constricted spot which you cannot reach with your hand. In order to reach this object, you must use a tool like tweezers, for example. Thus, in the aforementioned situation, you have experience, but you need the subtle ability to reach the object.

Allah *Glorified is He* is the All-Subtle: No matter how small or intricate something is, He is capable of exerting His Will upon it. This leads directly to His being All-aware; He is aware of all things, no matter how small, and He is capable of bringing all things to light, no matter how elusive they may seem. Indeed, the range of His Power is unfathomable; there is none that can prevent Him from carrying out what He wills. The characteristic of subtlety concerns penetration into things.

It is known that the smaller something is, the greater its ability is to cause harm. This is a connection we recognise in different created beings. Previously, we explained this by mentioning the example of someone who builds a home in a vast open space; in order to protect himself against animals and harmful insects entering his windows, he fixed a metal net upon them. With the addition of this iron net, the entry of thieves and large animals is blocked, but when he remembers mice and snakes, he is forced to tighten the spaces in the net. After this, he remembers flies and mosquitoes, and concludes that he needs something even tighter and more intricate in order to keep them out. Thus, the smaller and more harmful your enemy is, the more extensive your precautionary measures against him must be.

The statement of Allah *Glorified is He* '...for behold, Allah is unfathomable [in His Wisdom], All-Aware.' (*Luqman*: 16) means that He does not lack the knowledge of where things exist. The statement also entails ease and effortlessness in exerting His Will upon them.

Thus far, *Luqman peace be upon him* has only given some advice and sermons to his son; he has not issued him any religious assignment. His ardent desire is simply to make his son aware: You have committed yourself to belief in Allah; the system of Allah has reached you, and you have listened to its contents. Your responsibility is to follow the system and bring your actions into conformity with its commands and prohibitions. Nevertheless, before you take to the system of your Lord as your manner of conduct, you should be rest assured that you are engaged in the worship of an all-sustaining Allah, for He is not overtaken by sleep or slumber, nor is there anything that escapes Him. As you enter upon His Way, bear this in mind.

Likewise, by no means should you be given to the idea that your faith is somehow unsubstantiated because you do not physically see Allah, for indeed, even if you do not see Him, He sees you. You can be certain that you will be held accountable for every action you perform; it makes no difference whether it occurs in the nook of an inanimate rock, in the sky or anywhere on Allah's vast earth.

This issue is emphasised by the Qudsi Hadith that says: 'O, My slaves, if you do not believe I am watching you, your faith is plagued with doubt. On

the other hand, if you do believe that I am watching you, why have you made Me the least significant of all observers?⁽¹⁾

Afterward, Luqman *peace be upon him* resumes preaching his son, addressing the topic of religious assignment and responsibility before Allah; he says:

يَبْنِي أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ وَأْمُرْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَانْهَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ
وَأَصْبِرْ عَلَى مَا أَصَابَكَ إِنَّ ذَلِكَ مِنْ عَزْمِ الْأُمُورِ ﴿١٧﴾

**Keep up the prayer, my son; command what is right;
forbid what is wrong; bear anything that happens to
you steadfastly: these are things to be aspired to [17]
(The Quran, *Luqman*: 17)**

These are four points of religious assignment which Luqman *peace be upon him* begins with a command to perform prayer. Prayer (*salat*) is the second pillar of Islam after the testimony of faith: there is nothing worthy of worship besides Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. We have already learnt that because of its importance and priority, the assignment of prayer was delivered directly from Allah to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Also, due to its overwhelming importance, prayer has been made absolutely binding on a believer in all situations; there is never a time in which he is exempt from praying. The rest of the 'pillars' of the faith such as fasting during the month of *Ramadan*, paying the poor-due and making the Great Pilgrimage, on the other hand, may not be performed for some reason or another, and a believer is excused for the same. If you are exempted from these three duties, only the two testimonies of faith and prayer remain. This explains why Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made prayer the foundation of the faith.⁽²⁾

(1) Part of this Hadith has been established as a saying that was popular amongst those who concerned themselves with intuitive knowledge of Allah. To this end, it appears in *Hilyat Al-Awliya'* (8/142). It is narrated that a man said to Wahib ibn Al-Ward, 'Advise me!' To which Wahib replied, 'Beware of Allah lest you might make Him the least insignificant observer (in your regard).'

(2) A Prophetic Hadith says: 'The prayer is the foundation of the faith. Whoever establishes it has established his faith. And whoever fails to perform it has destroyed his faith.' Al-Hafizh=

For this reason, *Luqman peace be upon him* began with the prayer: 'O, my dear son! Be constant in prayer...' (*Luqman*: 17). This is due to the fact that prayer represents the constant declaration of loyalty to Allah, occurring five times a day. When your Lord summons you, by calling to prayer (*Allahu Akbar!*), it is not appropriate for you to busy yourself with whatever affair in preference to the call of the Creator. For example, what should be the attitude of a father who summons his son, while the latter ignores the former? You should be very careful not to make the mistake of failing to respond when your Lord summons you.

So, contemplate the call to prayer (*Adhan*); the wording of the *Adhan* was first revealed in a vision to two of the prophet's Companions, such people with pure and sound human nature. Then, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* adopted it: *Allahu Akbar. Allahu Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest. Allah is the Greatest)! That is Allah is greater than everything else which occupies your mind and time. It is absolutely unjustified for you to claim an excuse for not performing prayer on the basis of work, be it related to agriculture, manufacturing, or business.

As a matter of fact, I entered into a debate with a surgeon about this very issue. He said: 'How can I leave a surgery to perform prayer?' I responded to him, 'If you were overtaken by the sudden urge to relieve yourself in the bathroom, would you go or not?' He laughed, and then said, 'I would go.' I added, 'Well, the prayer is to be given more priority.' Do not be under the false impression that Allah *the Almighty* charges people with obligations but then gives them an insufficient amount of time to fulfil them. Indeed, Allah always takes the time constraints, individual capacity, and peoples' worldly benefits into account. For example, while travelling, shortening and joining prayers have been legislated for you.

You may perform prayers conveniently within the religious time permissions matching your circumstances. There is the permission of joining prayers by either

= Al-'Iraqi, (in his work [1/147] sourcing the Hadiths that appear in Ghazali's *Ihya 'Ulum Ad-Din*) mentioned. 'Bayhaqi narrated this Hadith in *Ash-Shu'ab* with a chain of narrators that he had already proclaimed weak in a tradition that was narrated by Umar.' Mulla 'Ali Al-Qari, in *Al-Asrar Al-Marfu'a* (Hadith # 578) mentioned In *Mushkil Al-Wasit*, Ibn Salah wrote: 'Indeed, this Hadith is not known.'

advancement or postponement. To be sure, you are allotted a considerable amount of open time (during travel) if you make advancement joining of the Afternoon and Late afternoon prayers by praying both in the time of the Afternoon prayer, then make postponement joining of the Sunset and Night prayers by praying both at the latest allowed time of the Night prayer. Likewise, you can conserve a great deal of time by making a postponement joining of the Afternoon and Late afternoon prayers by praying them during the latest allowed time of the Late afternoon prayer and pray the Sunset and Night Prayers by advancement joining during the earliest allowed time of the Sunset Prayer.

Thus, there is actually a great deal of convenience and no time tightness, as might be thought, to perform your prayers. There is absolutely no plea for anyone to abandon prayer. Some seek excuses based on the holy verse that says, 'Allah does not burden any human being with more than he is well able to bear ...' (*al-Baqara*: 286), and they claim being unable to perform the daily prayers. We draw their attention that one should not make their capabilities the judge on the appropriateness of a Divine ruling; rather, a Divine assignment itself is the fair judgment and the appropriate standard. As long as your Lord *Glorified is He* has commissioned you with religious duties, you can be certain that He knows your capacity and has designated your responsibility in accordance with your capacity. Indeed, this is evidenced by the dispensations given in case of inability to fulfil your obligations.

He says: '...Be constant in prayer ...' (*Luqman*: 17). Prayer is the first step toward building a community of believers that will implement the system of Allah. Through prayer, a human being is able to develop true faith. Previously, we pointed out the difference between the pillars of Islam and the pillars of a Muslim individual. The pillars of Islam are the five well-known religious practices around which the faith revolves. The pillars of a Muslim individual, however, are the practices constantly associating him in all situations, and he cannot be excused for neglecting them; these are the two testimonies of faith and prayer. Although it is the responsibility of a Muslim to believe that all of the pillars of Islam are perpetual obligations upon them, the ones other than the two testimonies and prayer can be skipped for any given reason.

After this, *Luqman peace be upon him* explained to his son that faith does not end with maintaining these two essential religious duties. Indeed, the

perfection of faith is expressed in loving for your fellow members of humanity that which you love for yourself. To this end, he says to his son: '...and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong...' (*Luqman*: 17). After you have fulfilled your responsibility of establishing prayer, make yourself busy with enjoining what is good and forbidding what is wrong. Prayer is a source of personal rectification while enjoining what is good and forbidding what is wrong is a function of transmitting that rectification to others. This expresses the height of faith, its perfection.

When you enjoin what is good and forbid what is wrong, you should not think that you are doing others a favour; quite the opposite is true, you are performing an action whose benefit will ultimately devolve upon you. By engaging in this endeavour, you will feel the abundant relief of your faith in addition to self-satisfaction and inner-peace. You will be content that you fulfil your duties while others omitted theirs.

There is no doubt that, when the others adhere to the Way of Allah, you will attain comfort too. Otherwise, the entire community will suffer from the evil of a handful of persons dissenting from the Way of Allah.

Undeniably, the loftiness of knowledge is expressed in a sense that you will not attain complete benefit from it unless you transmit it to others. If you withhold knowledge, and others are prevented from benefiting from the good of what you know, you will ultimately be unhappy because of their evil. Accordingly, we also maintain that you will not be able to benefit from the good of what others know unless you appropriately perform your duty of transmitting what you know. By commanding others to do what is good and to eschew what is evil, you demonstrate that you love for them exactly what you love for yourself. This way, you will gain two good fortunes: the good fortune of having performed your duty to Allah and the good fortune of being a member of a community that is working together to perfect each other's faith, a community which benefits you as opposed to harming you.

Additionally, another thing that can be observed about the verse we are currently discussing is that it breaks with the familiar pattern of linking the establishment of prayer with the payment of the poor-due. Normally, we find it stated: '... and be constant in prayer and spend in charity ...' (*al-Baqara*: 43).

When we index the word *zakat* (poor-due, charity, alms giving), we find that it occurs thirty-two times in the Quran. Two of these references, however, do not pertain to the well-known poor-due that is paid on assets annually; rather, they refer to purification. The story of Musa (Moses) and Al-Khidr *peace be upon them* provides us with one of those references: '...Have you slain an innocent human being without [his having taken] another man's life...' (*al-Kahf*: 74).

Then, in the subsequent verses of the same chapter, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and so we desired that their Sustainer grant them in his stead [a child] of greater purity than him and closer [to them] in loving tenderness.' (*al-Kahf*: 81) The meaning of this statement is that Allah purified them by ridding them of a source of both temptation and trial in their devotion to Him.

The second place is the statement of Allah *Glorified is He* saying: 'as well as by Our grace, [the gift of] compassion and purity ...' (*Maryam*: 13). The meaning of this statement is that Allah granted Maryam (Mary) *Allah be pleased with her* something to purify her thereby. An essential meaning of *zakat* (charity) is that a well-off person gives a poor one something the latter is lacking. Since Maryam (Mary) *Allah be pleased with her* was not married, she was, in a sense, lacking in this aspect. Therefore, Allah granted her a special charity: He breathed into her a spirit from Himself Allah *Glorified is He*.

In one place, the term *zakat* occurs as a reference to the payment of the poor-due, but it is unaccompanied by the command to establish prayer. In this instance, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And [remember] whatever you may give out in usury so that it might increase through [other] people's possessions will bring [you] no increase in the sight of Allah—whereas all that you give out in charity, seeking Allah's countenance, [will be blessed by Him], for it is they [who thus seek His countenance] who shall have their recompense multiplied!' (*ar-Rum*: 39)

In this verse of the chapter of Luqman, he says to his son: 'O, my dear son! Be constant in prayer and enjoin the doing of what is right ...' (*Luqman*: 17); he did not say, after commanding him to be constant in prayer, 'and pay the poor due.' Why not?

It is worth mentioning that the Quran joins the establishment of prayer with the payment of the poor-due because the prayer entails sacrifice of time; time is needed to work, and through work we earn our living. Therefore, the

time that you spend during prayer is a sacrifice of the most important element needed to earn money. During prayer, it is almost as if you give in charity one hundred percent of the money which you may earn during that time span. On the other hand, when paying the poor-due, you may give a tenth, a fifth or even as little as 2.5% of your earnings. You retain the larger part of your earnings. In fact, the monetary sacrifice entailed in performing the prayer is greater than that entailed in paying the actual poor-due!

Since giving charity is involved in both the prayer and alms giving, the Quran always mentions them side-by-side with the exception of this verse. When we contemplate this, we find it is an expression of the deep preciseness of the Quranic style. The Quran reports these advice in the context of Luqman's commandment to his son, and it provides us with two observations: Firstly: Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* does not charge the human individual with accountability for abiding by the Divine and religious rulings until he or she reaches the age of puberty except for prayer for which a Muslim individual bears responsibility at the age of ten. However, Allah requires the father or caretaker of a child to supervise the child's undertaking of this assignment. It then becomes responsibility of the father or caretaker of a child to command him to pray and to chastise him for neglecting it. The purpose of this seemingly early assignment of maintaining prayer is to impress upon the child the practice of praying regularly, so that when he does reach the age of sexual maturity, praying would have become something familiar to them. As an act of worship, prayer is something which requires training and repetition to learn. The early years of age are better suited for this to take place.

A father commands his son to maintain prayer on the basis of the former being the secondary, but the worldly direct, source of existence of the latter. It is as though Allah says: 'I am the ultimate source of all of your existences, and in that capacity I am delegating the task of commanding your child to establish prayer to you. Indeed, the contributions you, the parent, make to your child's well-being are apparent, and your efforts to support them are numerous and seen to them. You are perpetually in pursuit of ensuring their benefits, making every possible attempt to furnish their requests. Thus, if you command your child and he obeys you, it is an obedience for which you have already paid the price.

In so much as I (Allah) have delegated the responsibility of assigning establishment of the prayer unto you, it naturally follows that I must also delegate unto you the right to punish your child for failing to fulfil their duty. In case of omission by a child, you, the parent, will be held responsible for it. It is your fault, not theirs as I have commissioned you with supervising them to achieve this task.'

This explains why Luqman began instructing his son with the command to establish prayer because Luqman was responsible before Allah for issuing this command to his son. At the time that Luqman was offering these instructions and advice to his son, the latter was still of a relatively young age. This is evidenced by Luqman's calling his son, 'O, my dear son ...' (*Luqman*: 17). Here, the assignment is issued by a father. If the son had already reached the age of maturity at the time he received this advice from his father; thus, the meaning is to be conscious of your obligation before Allah to establish regular prayer.

Paying the poor-due is also an obligation that has been issued by Allah, but Luqman *peace be upon him* did not mention it here. This is an example of his wisdom and precise language. The Quran cites it so that we may derive principles that guide us in our daily life.

Secondly: If he ordered his son to pay the poor-due saying to him to establish prayer and pay the poor due, it would mean his son owned property. However, it is known that a son is not considered a complete owner of his property while his father is living. This assertion is proven by the statement of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'You and what you own belong to your father.'⁽¹⁾ We have already mentioned that Luqman, upon receiving word of his father's death, said, 'Now, my affairs are under my control.'⁽²⁾

(1) *On the authority of 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn Al-'As who said, 'A man approached the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him and proclaimed, "My father is attempting to destroy my wealth." The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him responded, "Indeed, you as well as what you own belong to your father." The Messenger of God peace and blessings be upon him also said, "Verily, your children are your most wholesome acquisitions, so take from their property as you wish." This Hadith was worded by Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (2292), Ahmad in his Musnad (1/179). The wording that appears above is from Ibn Majah's collection.*

(2) *Worded by 'Abdullah ibn Ahmad ibn Hanbal in Zawa'id Az-Zuhd on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn Dinar, 'Indeed, upon returning from a journey, Luqman met a young=*

This implies that during the lifetime of his father, his affairs were not under his control. This explains why he did not command his son to pay the poor-due. At the time when he was advising his son, the command to pay the poor-due was not the responsibility of his son, it was Luqman's own responsibility. This issue is reinforced for us when we read the following statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: '[All of you, O, believers, are brethren. Hence,] No blame attaches to the blind, nor does blame attach to the lame, nor does blame attach to the sick [for accepting charity from the healthy], and neither to yourselves for eating [whatever is offered to you by others, whether it be food obtained] from your [children's] houses, or your fathers' houses, or your mothers' houses, or your brothers' houses, or your sisters' houses, or your paternal uncles' houses, or your paternal aunts' houses, or your maternal uncles' houses, or your maternal aunts' houses, or [the house] the keys whereof are in your charge, or [the house] of any of your friends ...' (*an-Nur*: 61).

Allah has relieved us of difficulty in terms of eating at any of these places. Then again, we recognise that the verse mentions all of the immediate relatives except for children. The normal arrangement in which the relatives are mentioned requires mentioning the homes of children after mentioning the homes of mothers. Why not, then, is this not the case here? Many have pointed out that the homes of your children are included in the designation of 'your houses', which above actually includes the word children's parenthetically to further emphasise this point; this means that the home of the son is the home of the father. Indeed, whatever the son owns is the property of his father.

Next, Luqman *peace be upon him* instructs his son: '...and bear in patience whatever [ill] may befall you...' (*Luqman*: 17). Patience means bearing difficulty with equanimity and composure. In order to combat feelings of fear and anguish that often attend difficulty, patience is an essential quality. Confronting a tough set of circumstances, you need additional strength. Then you should not weaken your own ability to respond effectively by submission to fear and sadness.

= *man (from his village) along the way. He questioned the young man, "What's my father been doing?" When the young man replied, "He died," Luqman said, "Well, all praise is due to Allah. Now my affairs are under my control."* [Ad-Durr Al-Manthur 6/519]

Distress is caused by either a human or an act of Allah. An act of Allah is, for example, when one falls, breaks his leg or suddenly gets sick. These accidents are part from your predetermined fate in this worldly life, there is no necessary cause for their occurrence, nor must they be regarded as attempts to antagonise you. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* places them on the scale of your good deeds: either they will elevate your rank before Him, or they will expiate your sins. A relative hint in this respect is that disbelievers have always been happy whenever Muslims are afflicted by calamities, such as they were at the battle of Uhud; nevertheless, Allah *the Exalted* responded to them and clarified the foolishness entailed by their approach. He *the Most High* says: 'Say: "Never can anything befall us save what Allah has decreed for us..."' (*at-Tawba*: 51). Examining the preposition 'for' used in this verse, we notice that Allah did not say, 'decreed *upon* or *against* us'. This implies that what befalls believers is actually intended for their good, and not to harm them. It is not, then, wise that disbelievers be joyful about hardships befalling Muslims, is it not?

Within the arrangement of Luqman's advice, the counsel to be patient is mentioned after the command to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong. Indeed, when a person abides by these two principles, he will be exposed to some harm. Therefore, Luqman advises his son to confront enmity and hostility, in the course of enjoining what is good and forbidding what is wrong, with patience. It is your patience that secures you a great reward.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has clarified that the process of changing evil occurs at different levels, for he said: 'Whoever sees something wrong should change it (into good) with one's hand. If they cannot change it by his hand, let it be by speech. If this is also impossible, then they should abhor evil in his heart, and this is the weakest of faith.'⁽¹⁾

To be sure, Allah has commanded you to change what is wrong; however, he has placed the responsibility of assessing the situation and to what extent you can positively affect it, in your hands. Faith demands that you become a

(1) Narrated by Muslim in his *Sahih* (49) in the chapter entitled *Kitab Al-Iman*, by Ahmad in his *Musnad* (3/20, 49, 52), and by At-Tirmidhi in his *Sunnan* (2173) from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri Allah be pleased with him.

righteous reformer; yet, it does not necessitate that you give yourself to ruin in order to do so. When you run into wrongdoing, change it with your hand; if you have authority over a person responsible for the wrong action, your child, younger sibling, etc., you may chastise or forcibly prevent them from doing it.

For example, you may physically punish your son if you were to see a cigarette in his mouth or break a glass of wine from which he is drinking. Naturally, the same may be said of destroying any other intoxicants he is using. If you are unable or not allowed to practise physical punishment, it is sufficient for you to speak out against it, provided that you make a thoughtful statement which is not injurious to others or a cause for unrest. Indeed, some statements can cause greater harm than benefit.

Nevertheless, if you find yourself in a situation in which you are unable to take even this second-level step, wrongdoing should be changed with your heart. This occurs when you witness something wrong and possess only the power to say, ‘O, Allah, I acknowledge that this is an act of wrongdoing, and I know that You are not pleased by it.’ However, is this self-talk, action of heart or inner denouncing considered a method for changing a bad reality which we are required to change primarily by hand?

Scholars have said that changing wrongdoing with one's heart is considered an effective conduct only when there is a truthful inner feeling of denouncing which is reflected and confirmed by a visible physical attitude. This way, a Muslim individual rids himself of hypocrisy; in other words, if your heart bears witness that a particular action is wrong and displeasing to Allah, but you are unable to prevent or advise the doer against the bad behaviour, the least you can do is to forsake the wrongdoer. How can it be said that you are changing anything with your heart or otherwise if you continue to interact with this person as though you approve their actions?

Therefore, changing wrongdoing with one's heart only occurs if the one responsible for the wrong action senses that he is being ostracised. You should not congratulate them on good occasions, nor offer him condolences in case of bad ones; if you work in commerce, you cease to do business with them, etc.

The morally corrupt and dissolute would not be able to prosper and strut around boastfully if people deal with them like social outcasts; instead, people

probably have an increased level of respect for them because of fear of their corruption and wrongdoing.

Changing evil with one's heart does not occur by merely mentioning a word; it is more properly understood as an action and a disposition. Our Lord *Glorified is He* teaches us about this issue when He says: 'And, indeed, He has enjoined upon you in this Divine writ that whenever you hear people deny the truth of Allah's Messages and mock at them, you shall avoid their company until they begin to talk of other things – or else, verily, you will become like them. Behold, together with those who deny the truth Allah will gather in hell the hypocrites.' (*an-Nisa'*: 140) In another verse, He says: 'Now, whenever thou meet such as indulge in [blasphemous] talk about Our Messages, turn thy back upon them until they begin to talk of other things, and if Satan should ever cause you to forget [yourself], remain not, after recollection, in the company of such evildoing folk.' (*al-An'am*: 68)

A clear example in this respect is Prophet Muhammad's story⁽¹⁾ with 'the three companions who failed to join the Campaign of Tabuk without reason'.⁽²⁾ This story teaches us how to isolate those who commit major wrong actions; it is not by placing them in prison as we do now. On the contrary, it is by creating a situation in which the entire community shuns them. In mentioning the community, we are not simply referring to the general community; we are also intending their immediate circles and even their closest relatives.

As for the story, there was a group of men who offered excuses to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as to why they could not accompany him in that battle; Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* accepted the excuses on the basis of their outward import and left the ulterior motives they were concealing for the judgment of Allah. Yet, the three men around whom the story revolves failed to find any excuse for their non-participation, nor did they consider themselves capable of lying to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not imprison them physically; rather, he imprisoned them spiritually, making the entire community,

(1) *The story of the three who defaulted from the battle of Tabouk*

(2) 'The Three' refers to Ka'ab ibn Malik, Hilal ibn Umayya and Marara ibn Ar-Rabi'a Al-'Amiri

including their relatives, forsake them. In fact, each of the three men walked amongst people, attempting to pick an argument with someone in hope that this would force them to start talking to him, but no one paid him any attention. As for Ka'ab ibn Malik,⁽¹⁾ he scaled the wall of his cousin's garden and said to him, 'You know I love Allah and His Messenger', but his cousin did not respond to him. Moreover, Ka'ab was keen to pray beside Muhammad (*peace and blessings be upon him*) hoping that the Prophet would look at him, but the Prophet did not acknowledge him.⁽²⁾

Once this social isolation was successfully established at level of the outer community, the Divine law extended it to include their closest confidants: their wives. These three men were required to retreat from their wives. Their wives were ordered to refrain from contact with them until Allah *the Almighty* issued a definitive judgment concerning their case.⁽³⁾ One of the concerned wives⁽⁴⁾

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- (1) *He is Ka'ab ibn Malik ibn Ubayy Ka'ab Al-Ansari, 'Poet of the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him'. His mother is Layla bint Zayd from the tribe of Banu Salama. He was also known by the surname, Abu 'Abd Ar-Rahman. He was one of the seventy members of the Ansar present at 'Aqaba. He fought at Uhud, Khandaq and all of the other notable battles besides Tabuk, but Allah forgave him for this. Near the end of his life he migrated to Basra, and finally died there in the year 50 A.H. during the reign of Mu'awiya. He reached 77 years of age before he died which means that he was born 27 years before the Prophet's migration to Medina.*
 - (2) *Ka'ab ibn Malik recounted for us the feelings he experienced during those tense days. He said, 'As for Hilal ibn Umayya and Marara ibn ar-Rabi'a, they retreated to their homes and wept. As for me, I was at the high point of my youth and regarded myself as fairly resilient so I went out amongst the people, performing prayers, walking through the marketplaces, etc., but no one would speak to me. On one occasion, I came to the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him and attempted to greet him while he was sitting in a gathering after prayer. As I turned to walk away, I questioned myself, 'Did his lips move as he was returning my greeting or not?' Next, I prayed near him and glanced at him, and when I had finished performing prayer, he looked at me. Nevertheless, when I attempted to approach him, he turned away.'* [Sahih Muslim (2769) in the chapter entitled *Kitab At-Tawba*].
 - (3) *An emissary of the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him came to Ka'b ibn Malik and said to him, 'Indeed the Messenger of Allah has commanded that you refrain from conjugal relations with your wife.' I answered, 'Am I to divorce her, or what should I do?' 'No', he continued, 'just refrain from having relations with her.'* [Sahih Muslim (2769)]
 - (4) *This refers to Khawla bint 'Asim, the wife of Hilal ibn Umayya, one of the three men who failed to report for duty (during the Campaign of Tabuk) [Ibn Hajr, Fath 8/121] There is also a narration narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2769) and Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4418)=*

came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'O, Messenger of Allah, indeed my husband "wears a very tight garment" (a colloquialism that marks him as not being particularly libidinous).' Consequently, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* allowed her to remain in his service with the condition they refrain from engaging in conjugal relations.

These three men remained isolated from the general community and their families for a period of thirty days and an additional ten days for the general community. The general community as well as their families succeeded in making them feel the brunt of their poor decision-making. This is the manner in which the Divine law teaches us to isolate those who have been proven guilty of major wrong actions and crimes. The community withdrawing from them is a more effective rehabilitative strategy than withdrawing them from the community (as in the case of imprisonment). In the light of the aforementioned principle, the community's collectively shunning them proved to be utter misery for the three men.

Ka'ab ibn Malik narrated his story and how he was feeling in this event; he said: 'Despite its vastness, the earth was becoming too narrow for me.' The True Lord *Glorified is He* described this state in this verse: 'And [He turned in His Mercy, too,] towards the three [groups of believers] who had fallen prey to corruption, until in the end—after the earth, despite all its vastness, had become [too] narrow for them and their souls had become [utterly] constricted. They came to know with certainty that there is no refuge from Allah other than [a return] unto Him, and thereupon, He turned again unto them in His Mercy, so that they might repent, for verily, Allah alone is an Acceptor of Repentance, a Dispenser of Grace.' (*at-Tawba*: 118)

As soon as the general community as well as their families and loved ones united in implementing the Way of Allah, Allah gave these three men relief

= which reads: 'Indeed, the wife of Hilal ibn Umayya came to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, "O, Messenger of Allah, Hilal ibn Umayya is in a state of decrepit old age and does have a servant who can assist him. Do you find it objectionable for me to remain in his service?" "No," he responded, "However, he is not to approach you (for conjugal relations)." She replied, "By Allah, that hardly even seems to cross his mind. Indeed, he has not stopped crying since the day this happened until now."

from their trial, and the verse of relief was revealed: '...thereupon He turned again unto them in His Mercy so that they might repent, for, verily, Allah alone is an Acceptor of Repentance, Dispenser of Grace.' (*at-Tawba*: 118)

A person⁽¹⁾ rushed to Ka'b to convey the good news to him. Upon receiving the news, Ka'b was elated and commented, 'I was so happy that I would give him all my garments, as a reward, and then borrow a garment from elsewhere so that I could go to meet the Messenger of Allah!'⁽²⁾

Thus, we think it is a better method that the entire community isolate itself from interacting with an evildoer than imprisoning him. Nonetheless, that begs a question: 'Who will guarantee that our community faithfully assumes this task as the community of believers during the time of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* assumed it?

Returning to our examination of the types of calamities, we point out that if a distress were an act of Allah, it might be less bitter to you and you might find it easier to patiently endure; the case is between you and your Lord. On the other hand, if you were to experience a disaster clearly caused by someone antagonising you, the case would be quite different. For example, if a criminal burns your crops or murders your child, this will require a greater deal of patience and composure. Whenever you see your adversary, you are stirred with anger, and your blood nearly boils in your veins. It certainly requires a heightened level of equanimity and self-control to patiently endure such afflictions.

For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* speaks of this issue: 'But withal, if one is patient in adversity and forgives this, behold, is indeed something to set one's heart upon!' (*ash-Shura*: 43). The word 'indeed' is used to emphasise the additional amounts of self-control and self-discipline needed to prevent you from lashing out against your adversary each time you see them. On a slightly different note, it must also be observed that this verse is one of the places orientalists have sought evidence in their attempt to discredit the Quran.

(1) This refers to Hamza ibn 'Amr Al-Aslami. He was mentioned by Ibn Hajr Al-Asqalani in *Fath* (in the explanation of tradition # 4418).

(2) This is an excerpt from the narration of Ka'b ibn Malik which was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his *Sahih* (4418) and Muslim in his *Sahih* (2769).

They mockingly question: 'What is the difference between the verse, "...This, behold, is something to set one's heart upon!" (*Luqman*: 17), and the verse, "...this, behold, is indeed something to set one's heart upon!" (*Fussilat*: 43)?

Which of them is the most eloquent? If it is the first, then, the other must be deemed second-rate or at least not as eloquent as the first. In response to this query, we say that each of the previous two verses represents the height of eloquent delivery in their respective contexts. The verse with the emphasis structure, which is translated into the word 'indeed', is referring to a trial or test in which one is confronted with an adversary and thus employs emphasis to express the added measure of patience needed to overcome the trial. The other verse is mentioned within a context that also includes a trial or affliction of some sort but does not involve an adversary; in which case, it is a matter between you and your Lord. Patiently enduring the latter of these two occasions is comparatively easier.

Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* addresses this issue in order to purify the soul and prevent it from inclining toward vengeance; He says: 'But [remember that an attempt at] requiting evil may, too, become an evil ...' (*ash-Shura*: 40). This checks one's thirst for revenge, reminding him that there must be parity amongst retaliation and the initial act of aggression. Next, Allah *Glorified is He* demonstrates the moral high ground by opening the door of forgiveness, He says: '...hence, whoever pardons [his foe] and makes peace, his reward rests with Allah ...' (*ash-Shura*: 40). In a different verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Hence, if you have to respond to an attack [in argument], respond only to the extent of the attack levelled against you; however, to bear yourselves with patience is indeed far better for [you, since Allah is with] those who are patient in adversity.' (*an-Nahl*: 126)

Indeed, your Lord has permitted you to take revenge (when you have legitimately been wronged) but only with certain limits, so you must exercise a measure of self-control. As a matter of fact, once the right to avenge a wrong has been placed in your hands, you might decide to forfeit it and forgive the guilty party. Indeed, this serves as a good explanation for the particular phenomenon we see occurring in Upper Egypt, an area rife with blood feuds. There, a killer bears his own funeral shroud in his hands and submits himself

to the guardian of victim. With this show of submissiveness, the guardian is only left with the choice of forgiving the murderer.

Even in case of the crime of murder and its legally sanctioned retaliation, the True Lord *the Most High* has provided an option which elevates the human soul and grants it an opportunity to rise above the natural desire for revenge. In fact, Allah *the Exalted* has referred to both sides of the dispute involving a wrongful death as brothers; He *Glorified is He* says: '...And if something [of his guilt] is remitted to a guilty person by his brother, this [remission] shall be adhered to with fairness ...' (*al-Baqara*: 178).

In the midst of what appears the most unlikely circumstance, with blood spilling, our Lord is summoning us to fraternity, forgiveness, and spiritual excellence. There is a well-known difference between having a legitimate right and taking that right into your own hands.

Allah is the Creator of the human soul and is well aware of the instincts and emotions that are inherent in it. He also knows the values and principles that it settles upon. Yet, He *the Most High* does not establish rulings on the principle of moral sublimation; on the contrary, He has issued His Way in accordance with the nature with which He has created people. Indeed, not every member of humanity is at a level of scrupulousness that would allow him to seriously tolerate a command to forgive and pardon. This explains why Allah has granted the right to take retribution in the form, in which you were harmed, from the person that transgresses you: 'But [remember that an attempt at] requiting evil may, too, become an evil ...' (*ash-Shura*: 40). He also says: 'Hence, if you have to respond to an attack respond only to the extent of the attack levelled against you ...' (*an-Nahl*: 126).

In spite of this, when contemplating these verses, you find that implementing them 'on the ground' is quite a thorny issue. Who is there that actually possesses the self-control and detailed account of their actions in terms of their being appropriate or excessive so that they will force them to halt at the point of perfect reciprocation as Allah *the Almighty* commanded?

Previously, we clarified this issue by posing the question: If someone wrongs you and let us say, strikes you, for instance, will you be able to strike him just as he struck you, without exceeding the boundaries of exact reciprocation?

Indeed, if you exceed that limit, you become guilty of wrongdoing. Read the rest of the verse: '...hence, whoever pardons [his foe] and makes peace, his reward rests with Allah, for verily, He does not love evildoers.' (*ash-Shura*: 40)

In our earlier discussions we mentioned the story⁽¹⁾ of a Jewish financier who agreed to cut a pound (a weight consisting of about 449.28g) of flesh from the body of his debtor if the latter failed to repay a loan by a specified date. Nevertheless, the date of clearing the debt arrived, and the debtor was not able to pay. Consequently, the financier decided to take his affair before a court of law and explain the agreement before a duly appointed judge. The judge was granted special insight by Allah, the Exalted. He said to the financier, 'Yes sir, you do have the right to carry out that which was stipulated in the contract. In fact, I will give you the knife myself. If I understand things correctly, you do intend to cut a pound of flesh from the body of your debtor, right? Well, you must do so with a single blow and with the condition that if you fail to cut a pound or exceed it, the difference must be cut from your own body!' At this, the financier decided not to hold the debtor to the terms of the contract and immediately left the courtroom. If truth be told, exact reciprocation of harm is impossible to realise. It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* with the inclusion of this condition of exact reciprocation is turning your attention towards the fact that forgiveness and clemency are better for you and a superior demonstration of righteousness.

As such, the True Lord *the Most High* speaks to us about forgiveness and spiritual excellence when discussing a trial or test (in our lives) that involves a direct adversary. He makes it clear for us: Indeed, if you exercise the right that He has given to you and inflict reciprocal harm on the individual that has wronged you, you have relieved your conscience. However, you will deprive yourself from reaping the reward that Allah would have given you had you exerted forgiveness.

It seems as though the True Lord *the Most High* wants to turn the causes of hatred into causes of peace and friendliness. Indeed, if you forgive a murderer whom you are entitled to demand justice from (in the form of having his life

(1) The story of the Jewish usurer who lent a man money under the condition that if he delays in paying the debt he would cut off a pound of his flesh

taken), his life will become a testament to your forgiveness. Could he, afterward, ever think an evil thought about you?

This explains the teaching of our Lord: '...Repel (evil) with that (benign and graceful way) which is best, and lo, the person between whom and you there is enmity will behave as if he were your warm-hearted friend.' (*Fussilat*: 34)

Here, I would like to point out that someone came to me and said, 'By Allah, I have repelled evil with something that is better when dealing with my adversary. Nevertheless, I have not found him to have become as close, true friend, as Allah *Glorified is He* said.' I responded to him, 'You must reconsider your attitude. Perhaps, you think that you have repelled evil with something that is better while the reality indicates otherwise. If you truly encounter evil with good, Allah will realise His Word in your regard. You would witness your adversary become a true friend. However, you seem as though you desire to test the soundness of Allah's Word. In fact, testing Allah reveals doubt in Him.'

The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us to remain steadfast in our reliance upon Allah. This means that our disposition is characterised by trust without asking how the promises of Allah are fulfilled. The story of Um Malik,⁽¹⁾ a female companion of the Prophet, illustrates this: She owned some sheep that she used to milk, and from the milk exceeding her needs and those of her children, she used to churn butter, or ghee. She used to give some of this ghee to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in a small container of skin named *`akka* (in Arabic) as a gift. The household of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would empty the ghee out of the container, place it in some of their own smaller vessels and promptly return her container.

This continued until Um Malik⁽³⁾ finally concluded, 'By Allah, the only way I get the ghee needed to make broth is from this container.' Thus, every time she needed ghee, she would empty the container and find that it contained some. This went on, and she continued to lend the container to the household

(1) *She is Um Malik Al-Ansariya. She was mentioned by Ibn Hajar Al-'Asqalani in Al-Isaba fi Tamyiz As-Sahaba (8/278)*

of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* finding it to contain ghee even after they emptied it. Yet, one day it appeared to her that she had used the container to liberally, and she figured that it did not contain enough to suffice her, so she began to squeeze it; attempting to get the last of what it held, she found nothing inside. Immediately, she began to think that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was angry with her. Consequently, she went to him and told him of what had occurred. In response, he asked her, 'O, Um Malik, did you squeeze it?' After she replied in the affirmative, he explained to her that testing Allah reveals doubt in Him; furthermore, he informed her that had she refrained from squeezing the container and fought back the doubt (that Allah's blessing was about to expire), the container would have continued providing for her in the way that it had been.⁽¹⁾

It is noticed that the phrase 'may befall you' (in the verse in question) contains an indication that this 'ill' (as it has been parenthetically included with the verse) was decreed for you, and you would have never been able to avoid it. In the truest sense, it represents Allah's Divinely Pre-ordained Will that is merely reaching you. After the Decree of Allah is issued, it is inevitable that you will eventually be forced to deal with this misfortune. The issue is one of time; when will this 'arrow' of misfortune or calamity that has seemingly been hurled at you reach its target? By no means should you ever say, 'If only I had done this or that, the outcome would have been different.' This is absolutely not the case; as a matter of fact, the very reason the word *musiba*, or misfortune, has been used to describe the ill luck that befalls you highlights the fact that it has been particularly decreed for you; in other words, it comes from the same tri-lateral Arabic root (ص- و- ب) as the word *sa'iba* which indicates something apropos or particularly suitable. It follows, quite naturally, that you are unable to escape that which has been decreed

(1) In his *Sharh Muslim* (15/46), An-Nawawi wrote: 'The scholars have commented upon this Hadith. The wisdom is that squeezing—as she did with the container—is an action diametrically opposed to consignment to the Will of Allah and reliance upon His provision. Conversely, squeezing does imply an (unwarranted) dependence on one's own devices, forcefulness and placing oneself under duress in order to uncover the secrets of Allah's Wisdom and favour. Such an orientation can only result in the loss of the blessing that one is seeking to acquire or preserve.'

especially for you. It is as they say concerning death: You can certainly be sure that you will die; your life is the time span which the arrow of death takes until it reaches you.

As for Allah's saying, 'Indeed, [all] that is of the matters [requiring] determination' (*Luqman*: 17), we find that it includes the Arabic word '*azm*' (determination). This is similar to how we would say, 'So-and-so has resoluteness.' Observe how the Quran uses the word: '...And when you have decided, then rely upon Allah ...' (*Al-Imran*: 159).

'*Azm* (determination) refers to what is often called the point of no return; in other words, it means committing to something in a way that does not allow one to renege. The statement of *Luqman peace be upon him* provides a good example of how the term '*azm*' is used: When his Lord gave him the choice of being a messenger or a wise man, he subsequently chose the latter; he found within his choice ease and the alleviation of difficulty. He said to his Lord, 'O, Lord, if this—my being selected for prophethood—is a command from You, then I hear and obey.' When he mentioned, 'If this is a '*azma* (command) from You', the meaning is something which has been ordained, which means it would be unsuitable to abandon.

Resoluteness implies determination and firmness of purpose in performing an action. Concerning Islamic legal terms, there is a difference between '*azima*' and '*rukhsa*'. The funeral prayer is not considered '*azima*' (a religious duty that every Muslim should perform at its due designation) because it is a collective obligation whose performance by some Muslims frees others of its responsibility. This differs from the practice of performing a full-length prayer while travelling as opposed to shortening the prayer (which Imam Abu Hanifa *Allah rest his soul* actually considers '*azima*'). So, according to his opinion, completing a full-length prayer while travelling would constitute wrongdoing.⁽¹⁾

(1) *The Hanafi and Maliki scholars agree that shortening the full-length, four-unit prayer while travelling and offering two units instead is a highly emphasised Sunnah (practice) of the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him. However, they disagree upon its reward. The Hanafi scholars maintain that the one who completes the full-length, four-unit prayer is a sinner as he violates a religious duty. However, this does not mean he deserves to be punished in Hellfire. He will be entitled to receive the intercession of the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him on the Day of Judgment. The Maliki scholars, =*

Indeed, his opinion is based on the statement of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Verily, Allah loves for you to perform the dispensations (that He has given you) just as He loves for you to perform those acts which express the highest levels of resolve.'⁽¹⁾

The meaning underlined here is that you should not reject the facilitation Allah offers you regarding prayers while you are travelling.

The advocates of the opinion that prayer shall be shortened during travel cite another opinion that when prayer was made obligatory in the beginning, it was of two units. It was kept as such during travel as a continuation of this original obligation and was increased to four units for residents. Accordingly, prayer that is offered while travelling represents the original ruling; hence, it is not entirely correct to add any units of prayer to the original number.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَا تُصَعِّرْ خَدَّكَ لِلنَّاسِ وَلَا تَمْشِ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَرَحًا
إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ مُخْتَالٍ فَخُورٍ

Do not turn your nose up at people, nor walk about the place arrogantly, for God does not love arrogant or boastful people [18] (The Quran, *Luqman*: 18)

As for the word *tusaghghir* (translated as 'turn your nose up at people'), we find that *Al-Sa'r* (the verbal noun of the Arabic verb stated) originally refers to a disease which afflicts camels and made them lean forward to accommodate any swelling that occurs in their necks as a result of this disease. An arrogant person who turns his nose up at people, turning away from people, to whom he deems himself superior, is described with the word

= on the other hand, maintain that if a traveller abandons the shortening of the prayer and instead opts to pray four units of prayer, he is not a sinner; yet, he is not entitled to the reward of for the recommended *Sunnah*. However, this does not mean that he will be prevented from enjoying the intercession of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. See *Al-Fiqh 'ala Al-Madhahib Al-Arba'a*, Dar Ihya At-Turath Al-'Arabi, vol. 1, p. 431.

(1) Narrated by Ahmad in his *Musnad*, vol. 2, p. 108 and Ibn Hibban (545, 914) on the authority of Ibn Umar Allah be pleased with him

sa'ara because he resembles the diseased camel we mentioned above. To describe an arrogant person, a popular colloquial Arabic saying that goes as follows: 'So-and-so walks his head cocked.'

Therefore, in His saying: 'Do not turn your nose up at people...' (*Luqman*: 18), Allah chooses this simile in order to draw out attention that false pride and arrogance are diseases. The etymology of the term reveals a physical disease, and its usage in this verse reveals a moral one. Indeed, these are the meanings a poet had in mind when he said:

Leave alone the arrogant, for with them, time will deal

Indeed, time has a way of always causing arrogance to heal

This verse of poetry states that if the people who are present—during a certain time and place—are unable to break an arrogant person of this terrible character trait, one need not be troubled, for indeed, time itself shall show this person the recompense of such behaviour. Without a doubt, it is not unusual that we observe people behaving arrogantly and haughtily only to find that later in life those same people are hardly able to stand or even sit up properly! As a matter of fact, some become incapacitated to the extent of being unable to drive off flies which bother him.

A human being does not feel arrogance and haughtiness towards people unless he feels that he has distinction over them. This is proven by the fact that when such person encounters someone that he deems superior to himself, he expresses humility and humbleness. Take for instance, a tough guy who used to have authority at local domains. He sits in the café with his legs folded, appearing to be unconcerned about anyone. Nevertheless, when a stronger tough guy appears, you find that the former straightens up.

This explains the wisdom of the maxim which states, 'Beware the man who has received charity from you.' Why is this so? This is because the one to whom you have been charitable was experiencing a hard time where he was weak and needy. Your help and favour provided to him at that time aided and supported him. Now experiencing ease and richness, whenever he sees you, he remembers those hard times he had experienced and thus may harm you in order to overcome this situation. Nevertheless, he must always express

humility when he sees those who showed him good favour—when he was in a time of need. It is as though the presence of the one who helped him at his time of need is a point of weakness which prevents him from showing his powerful and self-confident image he attempts to project. This is why they say: ‘Beware the man who has received charity from you.’

The other thing to be emphasised at this point is that if someone is going to be arrogant regarding something, it would make sense for him to do so concerning that which is inherently his, and not something which has been given to him. If you do, in fact, recognise that you possess some sort of distinction above others, be sure to consider that others also have distinction over you. When you begin to look at the creation in this way, you will find that the Creator has given all of His created beings special qualities.

In this connection, there is a story to be told. Once upon a time, there was a maid who would entertain her mistress as she was beautifying her. The maid used to pray to Allah that her mistress would indeed meet Prince Charming. On one occasion, her mistress said to her, ‘I am really disheartened at your sort. Indeed, you are of dark complexion and unlikely to attract the attention of any worthy suitors.’ The maid responded, ‘O, mistress, remember that your beauty is only recognised by people on account of their recognition of my ugliness.’ Indeed, the one who you see as ugly could, in fact, be beautiful; if nothing else, he does reflect the beauty of the creative power of Allah *Glorified is He*. The servant once again addressed her mistress, ‘Be careful not to anger Allah by speaking in that way. Do you find fault with the creation, or do you find it with the Creator? If you only realise my honesty towards all what you command me and your negligence with regards to fulfilling your father demands, you would understand my beauty.’ Indeed, a poet has expressed the same meaning:

Faces are like the first light of morn, shining. And hair is enveloped in darkness like night

It is perfect when opposites are joined; each brings the other’s beauty into sight

Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us the same lesson when He says: ‘O, you who believe! No men shall deride [other] men. It may well be that those [whom they deride] are better than themselves. No women [shall deride other] women;

it may well be that those [whom they deride] are better than themselves...' (*al-Hujurat*: 11). This means that if you notice that a person has less status than you in a certain regard, look deep inside yourself and search for the thing in which he excels you. Undoubtedly, there must be something in which he excels you. This maintains the balance of nature. Allah distributes His gifts among the entire creation. He has not shown any favouritism or impartiality in this. I reiterate what I have just said that the aggregate sums of God-given endowments granted to all human beings are equal.

I have mentioned earlier that a man said to *Luqman peace be upon him* 'We know that you are a swarthy slave with very pronounced lips who serves so-and-so and tends sheep.' Did *Luqman peace be upon him* not respond to him saying, 'Yes, those are accurate descriptions. However, my heart is radiant with light. And from these pronounced lips wisdom—sweet and delicate—is said.'⁽¹⁾

In relation to *Luqman peace be upon him*, it is sufficient honour that Allah *Glorified is He* has recounted his words in the Glorious Quran. Essentially, Allah has made his words eternal; thus, they are recited, memorised and rehearsed during worship—until the Day of Judgment.

I have some observation about Allah's saying: 'Do not turn your nose up at people ...' (*Luqman*: 18); the word 'people' in this verse has significance. It is as if that Allah *Glorified is He* is saying to the one who turns his nose up at people: 'Do not lead people to disobedience and rebellion against Allah's Decrees by your arrogant display of the advantages that have been conferred upon you and simultaneous disregard those that have been conferred upon others. Indeed, there is a chance that someone struggling in his faith could be led to rebel against Allah and flagrantly reject the idea that He has rightly decreed all things which take place on earth when he observes you flaunting and exulting in what you have been given, while recognising his own status as lowly. If, on the other hand, this type of flaunting and parading is so dear to

(1) Cited by *Al-Qurtubi* in his *Tafsir*, vol. 7, p. 5317 in which he mentioned the following: *Luqman peace be upon him* said to a man that looked at him, 'If I really have pronounced lips, remember that they only pronounce refine words. And although my skin is dark, I am light-hearted.'

you that it has become something of an enterprise, then let it be a private affair. You may then stand in front of a mirror and strike poses to satisfy your heart's desire for this sickness.

Accordingly, the word 'people' in this verse signifies that Allah *the Almighty* wants to prevent people from observing you in this state because it will inevitably become a challenge for those who are weak in their faith, frustrating their contentment with their Lord.

Afterward the verse continues with Luqman's advice to his son, stating: '...nor walk about the place arrogantly...' (*Luqman*: 18). Allah *the Almighty* does not prohibit you from walking upon the earth. However, he prohibits you from walking amongst people in a swaggering manner, i.e. in a way which indicates smugness. Allah *Glorified is He* commands us: '...go about, then, in all its regions, and partake of the sustenance which He provides, but [always bear in mind that] to Him you shall be resurrected.' (*al-Mulk*: 15) This means that going about the earth is desirable. Then again, it is only desirable if it is done in a certain manner, in a way that implies balance and moderation. It is narrated that 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* once saw a man going about in a sluggish, listless manner. Therefore, 'Umar upbraided him and said, 'O, so-and-so, why are you carrying yourself this way? Indeed, Allah has given you wellness and good health. Let this be your case when you become old!'⁽¹⁾

On the other hand, when 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* saw a man walking like a bandit; he prevented him from walking hurriedly, running and rushing. Thus, the desired speed when one is walking is to maintain a balanced pace. This is why we shall see that the advice of Luqman *peace be upon him* includes: 'Go at a moderate pace ...' (*Luqman*: 19). This means that one shall not walk sluggishly and listlessly, nor walk excitedly—as though one is nearly jumping—like the people of immorality and bandits.

This verse concludes: '...for Allah does not love arrogant or boastful people.' (*Luqman*: 18) *Al-Mukhtal* (arrogant) is the person who finds that he

(1) See Imam Al-Ghazali in *Al-Ihya'*, vol. 3, p. 296. It is narrated that 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* upon seeing a man hanging his head, said, 'Raise your head, O, downcast one! Humility is not in the neck. It is in the heart.'

has been given some sort of distinction amongst people, while *Al-Fakhur* (boastful person) is normally a person who deems himself superior to all people. In truth, Allah *Glorified is He* does not like either of them. Indeed, Allah *the Exalted* desires to judge creation on the basis of equality so that they all make sure that He is the Lord of them all. Only Allah can be justifiably haughty. If we submit to the fact that the only justifiable haughtiness belongs solely to Allah, this prevents people from dealing with us haughtily. Conveying this same meaning, one poet once said,

It is the prostration that you perform in sincere adoration to Allah
that saves you from performing a thousand others in subjugation

Therefore, we collectively prostrate to Allah, the Only One truly worthy of our prostration, and in doing so, we protect ourselves from surrendering and prostrating to misguided, conceited and supercilious oppressors. Indeed, the greatness of Allah *the Almighty* is in the best interest of His servants.

Afterward, Allah *Glorified is He* — narrating the dialogue that took place between Luqman *peace be upon him* and his son — says:

وَأَقْصِدْ فِي مَشْيِكَ وَاعْظُضْ مِنْ صَوْتِكَ إِنَّ أَنْكَرَ الْأَصْوَاتِ لَصَوْتُ الْحَمِيرِ ﴿١٩﴾

**Go at a moderate pace and lower your voice, for
the ugliest of all voices is the braying of asses [19]
(The Quran, *Luqman*: 19)**

This is a command from Allah to people to walk moderately and to speak in a lower tone of voice. It is sufficient that you speak in a tone, which only the listener hears. However, why has the Quran joined between walking and the tone of one's speaking voice? Scholars say that human beings have certain necessities in their lives. They acquire these necessities either by walking—I walk to places in which I expect to attain some sort of benefit or goal—or by speaking—if I am unable to arrive at something or catch up to someone by walking, I call out to him using my voice.

Accordingly, either you go to the things that you wish to acquire or you summon them to you. The idea of moderation in seeking your attainments, however, is central to all matters. To be sure, all things have two extremes:

exaggeration or negligence. This explains why a maxim states: It is contemptible to seek either of the two extremes in your affair.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* compares the loud, impudent voice to the braying of a donkey: '...for the ugliest of all voices is the braying of asses' (*Luqman*: 19). Ironically, some have understood this verse to contain an offensive reference to donkeys. Truth be told, often times we do find that people consider the donkey to be a representation of stupidity and lowliness. This is expressed in the following couplet of poetry:

The only things that are fit to have unrestricted weight heaped upon them
are the two lowly ones: wild asses and pegs

Ignominy is inherently tied to these things

And if one of them is misused or broken, no one finds cause to lament

However, we find fault with the poet's description of the donkey as worthless and lowly. In describing its worthlessness, he links it with a peg, an instrument that has become parable for lowliness. In fact, there is even a saying: 'more worthless than a peg'. Indeed, one may bang a peg with a heavy tool until it splits in two without any one objecting to or feel angry at your action. However, a donkey is subjected to human beings, and not worthless. To be sure, it should not be regarded as lowly simply because Allah *the Almighty* has decreed it to be a beast of burden.

If you take a moment to seriously contemplate the life of a donkey, you find that it is constantly abused by human beings. You can force a donkey to carry manure and other forms of filth and leave it to spend the night sleeping in mud, and no one would object to your actions. In addition, if you want an animal for riding, you simply wash off the donkey, place a saddle upon its back and reins in its mouth, and it will promptly deliver you to your destination without objection or complaint.

People say that the wisdom of a donkey making such a unique loud sound is that it is of short stature, especially when compared to larger animals like camels. Therefore, when it goes out to feed from fodder, there is a chance that it will be blocked by a hill or a tree, which would make it nearly impossible for its owner to see it unless it begins to bray. It is almost as if its braying is

one of those natural and necessary mechanisms that is particularly suited to the one that possesses it, thus, securing one of its essential needs.

This is why it is essential that we understand the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* '...for the ugliest of all voices is the braying of asses' (*Luqman*: 19) as clarifying that the braying of a donkey is not ugly when it is being done by a donkey. Actually the reverse is quite true; it is ugly when the speaking voice of a human being resembles the braying of a donkey! Indeed, the braying of a donkey is one of its essential characteristics and may even be said to perfect its unique nature. Conversely, when your voice resembles this sound, it is contemptible and loathsome. In light of this, can a donkey be considered guilty of any wrong?

Consider the camel, for instance, it is bigger and stronger than a donkey, but when you place a heavy load upon its back, it neighs. The donkey, on the other hand, when loaded beyond its capacity, makes an attempt to bear the load without giving you the slightest indication that it is overburdened. A donkey is governed by the natural disposition that when it faces a small ditch, it senses its ability to pass it; if it is able to leap the opening, it will jump and if, on the other hand, the opening is wider than would allow the donkey to successfully clear it, it will instinctively pull back. After making its assessment, it makes no difference how much you attempt to compel the animal to leap.

Interestingly enough, if we contrast a donkey's actions with those of a human being, we find that the latter—if placed in a similar situation—would likely be persuaded by hubris to attempt something clearly above his capacity. On a different note, it is said that when a donkey brays, it sees a devil.⁽¹⁾ Based on experience, we know that some animals, including donkeys, are able to sense that an earthquake is forthcoming. Before an earthquake, you will see it severing its reins and taking cover. This was observed before an earthquake that occurred in Agadir, Morocco. We also noticed a similar

(1) *It is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him who said, 'When one of you hears the crowing of a rooster, ask for Allah's favour because it has just seen an angel. Likewise, if one of you hears the braying of a donkey, seek refuge in Allah from Satan, for it has just seen a devil.'* Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his *Sahih* (3303) and Ahmad in his *Musnad* (2/307, 321, 364).

phenomenon during an earthquake that took place in Egypt in 1992, for the animals at Giza Zoo were said to have been strangely restive shortly before the earthquake.

It is worth mentioning that when you ride a donkey in a certain path, it makes no difference how long, it will be capable of returning down the same path without needing to be guided. In fact, even if you returned to a path it travelled a long time ago, the donkey will follow the course without deviating in the slightest. Nevertheless, those who hold to views, which mark the donkey as inherently deficient, maintain that a donkey does not intelligently retrace the route; rather, it is simply placing its hooves in the tracks that were left behind. Yet, even if this is the case and a donkey does not actively pursue the path by the use of its intellect, it still deserves to be commended for this ability as it follows the dictates of instinct.

This applies also Allah's saying: 'The example of those who were entrusted with the Torah and then did not take it on is like that of a donkey who carries volumes [of books]...' (*al-Jumu'a*: 5). In this verse, the verb is affirmed and negated in the same sentence. Is it normal to do as such? The meaning of this seemingly complicated verse then is that that they had learnt the scripture and preserved it, both within their books and hearts. However, they did not act according to its dictates and failed to implement its teachings. Thus, the parable of what they were doing, '...is like that of a donkey who carries volumes [of books] ...' (*al-Jumu'a*: 5), should this in any way be regarded as an expression of contempt for the ass? Absolutely not, indeed, the duty of an ass is to carry loads. Quite the reverse is true, the contempt is being directed at their carrying the Book of Allah while failing to act upon it. To put it differently, a donkey is supposed to carry books, but people, on the other hand, are supposed to understand the content of the books they are carrying and implement their teachings.

Accordingly, a believer shall be of moderate tone-of-voice while he performs prayer as well as all other acts of worship. Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us: '...And [pray to Him; yet] be not loud in your prayer nor speak it in too low a voice, but follow a way in-between' (*al-Isra'*: 110). As for the prayers and Quranic recitation that you hear broadcast during the night on megaphones, bullhorns and loudspeakers, the only thing they succeed at doing is earning

the scorn of the sick and those who need to rise early for work the next morning, not to mention countless others who are disturbed by this practice. Having conducted a survey, we found that the number of people who attend the mosque stays relatively the same; it does not increase as a result of our disturbing people with microphones!

The same can be said of those who recite the Quran in an unnecessarily loud tone of voice while in the mosque: This practice is also a source of annoyance for people. Is it not better for us to allow each person—who is present in the mosque—to focus on the devotional act which they have selected for themselves? Such individual might desire to pray, someone else may want to recite litanies of repentance and praise, or perhaps one of the mosque-goers simply wants to sit and quietly read the Book of Allah, the Quran. Why then, do you force everyone to be involved in your voluntary act of devotion?

After we have completed the verses which give us a glimpse of the wisdom and counsel that Luqman *peace be upon him* was imparting to his son, the verses of this chapter of the Quran discuss a new topic related to our existence.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

الَّذِينَ تَرَوْنَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ سَخَّرَ لَكُمْ مَّا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَأَسْبَغَ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعَمَهُ ظَاهِرَةً
وَبَاطِنَةً وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يُجَادِلُ فِي اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَلَا هُدًى وَلَا كِتَابٍ مُّنِيرٍ ﴿٢٠﴾

[People], do you not see how God has made what is in the heavens and on the earth useful to you, and has lavished His blessings on you both outwardly and inwardly? Yet some people argue about God, without knowledge or guidance or an illuminating scripture [20] (The Quran, *Luqman*: 20)

The Arabic word *taskhir* which is derived from the verb *sakhkara* (translated in the verse as 'made useful to you'). *Taskhir* refers to what happens when the Creator *the Most High* gives something in creation a specific function to perform without giving that object any choice in the matter. Indeed, a good example of this is the way that Allah has made the sun, moon, and other elements of creation subservient, in spite of the fact that many men and women turn away from Allah and His Guidance. The sun never, not even for

a single day, fails to shine upon them; nor does the air ever refuse to provide them with oxygen. In addition, the earth does not withhold its produce from them; or the sky its water. The question, however, is why does this not happen? This is because all these created beings have no choice in the matter.

In mentioning the subservience of the various created beings and objects, it is fitting for us to point out that these elements have not been subjected to the service of humanity against their will. This is a shallow way of looking at this issue. Unfortunately, some consider the human being as the only member of creation who has been given the choice to accept legislation or not. In fact, the entire creation has actually been put the test of choice. This is clearly stated in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Verily, We did offer the trust [of reason and volition] to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains, but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet man took it up – for, verily, he has always been prone to be most wicked, most foolish.' (*al-Ahzab*: 72)

Thus, we can see that all of the various elements which make up creation have been given choice: the sky, earth, and mountains. However, each chose to be constantly obedient and submissive, instead of having free will.. In contrast, a human being chose to be of free will. This choice was primarily based on the fact that he possesses an active intellect which can be used to weigh between competing alternatives.

Taskhir, i.e. making things subservient to people, means that man cannot independently make things submissive to his will through his intelligence, ability to reason or even by legislation. As proof of this assertion, consider the following: If you catch a bird, confine it to a cage, prevent it from flying, and then desire to ascertain whether the bird is subservient to you or not. Would confining the bird to this cage make it legitimately subservient to you or not? Simply open the door of the cage; if the bird elects to remain in the cage, it is truly subservient to you. It is content to remain with you, secure in the place that you provide and content consuming the feed that you give it. Alternatively, if it leaves and abandons your care, you should realise that it is not subservient to you, and that confining it in spite of its will to be free is not legitimately subservient.

Once ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* passed by a little boy who was playing with a small bird. ‘Umar wanted to teach the boy an important lesson as he

was young and still very impressionable. 'Umar convinced the boy to sell the bird. Once in possession of the bird, 'Umar released it and let it fly away. At this, the boy remarked, 'By Allah, after that, I never confined an animal again for the sake of amusement.'

I talked about the idea of subjugation of creatures to man previously. Indeed, the way that Allah has subjected a camel, with its immense size, to human beings so thoroughly that a small child can guide and direct it to where he would like it to go is amazing. At the same time, Allah *the Almighty* has not subjected a seemingly insignificant creature like a tick to your use. This clearly proves that has Allah not made such creatures submissive to man, man would have never been able to make use of them.

Then the verse continues: '...and has lavished His blessings on you both outwardly and inwardly?...'*(Luqman: 20)* Here, we find the word *asbagha* (lavished) which means to fulfil or complete. Another form of this Arabic word is mentioned in another Quranic verse as Allah says, addressing Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him*: '...Make full coats of mail...' (*Saba'*: 11). This is a command from Allah to Prophet Dawud (David) to make chain mail that shields and protects the one who wears it from sword and spear attacks. Chain mail or armour is usually placed over the vital organs of the body, such as the heart or lungs. Indeed, it was Allah *Glorified is He* who taught Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* to make chain mail in the ribbed, corrugated iron style as opposed to a smooth metal design. The notches within the ribs of the chain mail help to lessen the impact of the blow and prevent the sword or spear from moving and hurting another place of the body.

It is narrated that Luqman *peace be upon him* once went to Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* while the latter was forging iron. Luqman was amazed by the sight; however, he refrained from questioning Prophet Dawud (David) about what he was doing until he finished blacksmithing the chain mail and had tried it on while saying to himself: 'What a perfect armour for battle.' At hearing this, Luqman commented, 'Silence is wisdom, but those who practise it are few.'⁽¹⁾

(1) Worded by 'Askari in *Al-Amthal*, Hakim, and Bayhaqi in *Shu'ab Al-Iman* on the authority Anas: Luqman was a slave who belonged to Dawud (David) *peace be upon him*. Needless to say, he was amazed when he found his master constructing chain mail. As Dawud=

This statement of Luqman *peace be upon him* eventually became an aphorism that will be repeated until the end of time.

The phrase 'and has lavished upon us His blessing' means that Allah has completed his favour upon you so thoroughly that it encompasses all aspects of your life. He is consistently providing for you all means of livelihood, which help you survive in this world as He is the One Who created you, and therefore, He knows all what you need.

However, if you happen to notice any deprivation or shortage, it should be understood that the real shortage is in the creatures themselves. In other words, they have an inability to make beneficial use of what their environment provides for them. Furthermore, what they do acquire, they hoard stingily and withhold from others. The last of these problems, namely hoarding and stinginess, are the biggest problems facing our world today. Indeed, we often find a group of people that have lazily neglected to make use of their environment to derive good while other people have been exerting themselves to do so. However, the unfortunate thing is that the latter group does not allow others to benefit from the fruits of their labour. One group of people might attain fortune in such abundant measure that it can afford the whole humanity, but they opt to dump it in the sea. This means that at a time when others are dying as a result of hunger and poverty, they are destroying the resources of which hungry and impoverished people are sorely in need.

In this way, we can conclude that the problem with our world is not that human beings are unable to find that which suffices them. On the contrary, the problem is that human beings have failed to equitably utilise that which they have found from amongst the good things that Allah *Glorified is He* has provided for them. This proves the truthfulness of Allah's saying: '...and has lavished His blessings on you both outwardly and inwardly?' (*Luqman*: 20) It

= (David) *peace be upon him* began to shape the iron, spinning and twisting it, Luqman's curiosity began to surge (and he wanted to ask him about what he was doing), but his wisdom prevented him. Once Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* had finished the mail, he tried it on and said to himself: 'Armour for battle is exceptional.' Upon hearing this, Luqman *peace be upon him* said, Silence is wisdom, but those who practise it are few. Truthfully, I wanted to ask you (about what you were doing), but I opted to remain quite until you informed me.'

is an absolute truth; do you deny that He *the Most High* created you? Or do you deny that He created from yourselves, mates for you, with whom the process of procreation is complete?

Do you deny that He created the skies and all that they contain namely the planets and the other celestial bodies? Or do you deny that He created the night, during which time you take rest, and the day, during which you strive to earn a livelihood? Also worth mentioning in this regard are the senses—both physical and non-physical—that He has given you; not only has He created each sense to fulfil a specific purpose, but He has also made these senses perform their tasks involuntarily so that you do not even feel that your body contains miraculous signs and wonders. It is simply amazing; not nearly a day passes without there being some breakthrough which sheds more light upon the blessings that Allah has placed within us, and the world around us.

The word 'outwardly' refers to that which is apparent to us, whereas the word 'inwardly' refers to that which we have yet to realise. Accordingly, we recognise from this statement that there are blessings of Allah *the Exalted* that are apparent to us and to those which have not yet become apparent.

Think about the kidneys for a moment, particularly about how they are functioning within your body. They purify the blood from urea. This means that they are literally purifying your insides, but you cannot even feel them at work. Researchers began to think about creating a replacement for kidneys in order to deal with the occurrence of acute kidney failure. To this end, specialised scientists came up with a design that took up one large room filled with instruments in order to perform the function of that organ of small size, the kidneys. It then occurred to them that the kidney was made up of millions of cells, but only a hundred at a time work to perform its function through alternating.

Scientists then concluded that kidney failure occurs when the one hundred cells that are responsible for performing its function are not alerted by the body at an appropriate time. Allah has perfected the creation of the human being to such an extent that He created two kidneys; when one of them fails, the other assumes its function.

Concerning the inward blessings of Allah, they are the things which will be discovered in the future. For example, centuries or even years ago, nothing

was known about electricity, automobiles, simple machines, the age of the wheel or steam power, etc.

Now, all of these things have become outward blessings. However, before their discovery, they were concealed from us. They were discovered through scientific inquiry and research. When one reflects over such discoveries, he finds that roughly 3% of them were developed by scientific research and about 97% of them were discovered simply by chance!

Previously, we confirmed that Allah *Glorified is He* has placed innumerable secrets and blessings in this universe. No one may argue that such signs and secrets have performed their respective functions. This is absolutely not true as they shall last as long as this world exists. Such signs and secrets shall not perish, as Allah *Glorified is He* states: '...until—when the earth has assumed its artful adornment and has been embellished, and they who dwell on it believe that they have gained mastery over it—there comes down upon it Our Judgment, by night or by day, and We cause it to become [like] a field mown down, as if there had been no yesterday ...' (*Yunus*: 24).

In the Afterlife, we will see something entirely different from amongst Allah's signs and the wonders that He has created. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is informing us: 'Verily, you witnessed My signs in this life and grasped them. Now, come so that I shall show you My greatest signs, which I have prepared for you in the Afterlife.'

In the Afterlife, I shall create you in another shape; you will eat, but not feel the urge to defecate or pain that comes as a result of eating without defecating. You will not grow old, become sick, or die. In this worldly life, your lives were based on the means I have created for you, but in the Afterlife, on the other hand, you shall not be in need of any means such as the sun and moon etc., as you shall live according to Provider of the means.

This is why I say that to show their humbleness, scientists should say, 'We have discovered such-and-such', instead of 'We have invented such-and-such.' This is because the Allah's signs and Blessings are already hidden in this universe. They are simply in need of someone to explore and develop them using general rules of laws, which Allah *the Almighty* has placed in the universe.

I have previously said that every secret in this universe has a birth date exactly like a human being. When the time of its 'delivery' arrives, Allah brings it into existence. Either he does this by way of the research of scientists, or it simply appears without effort, as a manifestation of honour from Allah *Glorified is He* to His creation, whose concerted efforts to discover such secrets have not been very successful.

This is considered evidence for us to believe in the unseen of which Allah informs us. As we come to discover the blessings of Allah that were at one time hidden in this universe, then, by extension, we should also have faith in such unseen things that Allah is informing us about. In this, we are using that which is clearly manifest as evidence of the existence of that which is hidden.

In this connection, refer to Allah's saying: '...they cannot attain to aught of his knowledge save that which He wills [them to attain] ...' (*al-Baqara*: 255). This verse is stating that it is Allah's Will that determines what remains unseen as well as what becomes manifest to humanity—after having been unseen. If Allah *the Exalted* has decreed that the 'uncovering' of an element of the unseen will occur as the result of research, this is what takes place. Conversely, if He determines that this will be unveiled without any effort being exerted by human beings at all, this is what takes place. This is proven by the fact that Allah states that people may attain knowledge only when He wills.

Nevertheless, regarding the matter of the unseen for which Allah places no indication in this universe, He solely knows them. He *the Most High* asserts this saying: 'He [alone] knows that which is beyond the reach of a created being's perception, and to none does He disclose aught of the mysteries of His Own unfathomable knowledge, unless it be to a messenger whom he has been pleased to elect' (*al-Jinn*: 26-27).

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* divides His Blessings and Favours into 'both outward and inward' (*Luqman*: 20) because the outward blessings stimulates, or encourages, us to believe in Allah *the Most High*. On the other hand, the inward blessings are of two categories: those whom Allah saves that every successive generation unveils a part of them, and those which Allah will not reveal for believers until the Hereafter.

Muslim scholars have made other attempts to explain the relationship between the outward and inward blessings. The outward blessings are those which Allah gives us in this worldly life and makes them apparent. On the other hand, inward blessings are those about which Allah has informed us. For example, when you set to engage in fighting, you would prepare all the required supplies: weapons, brigade, etc. In other words, you would make use of the means necessary to achieve that end. Yet, if Allah wills, He may assign hosts which you did not see to accompany you which, upon this understanding, would be considered from amongst His inward blessings as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Remember when Your Lord inspired the angels [to convey this His message to the believers]: "I am with you ..."' (*al-Anfal*: 12).

Informing us about some of these inward blessings, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'The believer benefits from three actions which are not his own. The first is that Muslims perform funeral prayer for him after his death. The second is that Allah gives him permission to bequeath up to a third of his wealth as he chooses. That is to say, he is not obligated to leave all of his wealth to heirs; rather, he can bequeath up to a third of his estate to any entity he deems suitable. It makes sense for one to enjoy one's wealth during his life, but after his death, it is the heir's. However, Allah gives one the right to bequeath up to one third of one's estate as a means for one to atone for his sins by bequeathing some of his estate for charitable purposes. As for the third action, Allah *Glorified is He* conceals your bad deeds from the rest of creation, for indeed if He were to expose your bad actions to people, you would be rejected by your own family, loved ones and relatives.'⁽¹⁾

(1) *It is on the authority of Ibn `Abbas Allah be pleased with him that he said, 'I asked the Messenger of Allah about Allah's saying: "...lavished upon you His blessings, both outward and inward? ..."' (Luqman 20). Thereupon, Prophet Muhammad responded, "As for the outward blessings, they are Islam, you being created by Allah and His furnishing your provision abundantly. The inward blessing, on the other hand, is the fact that Allah has concealed your bad actions. O, Ibn `Abbas, verily Allah Glorified is He says: 'I have made three things for the believer: the prayers of the Muslims for him after he dies; I have given him a right to bequeath up to one third of his wealth to charity by way of which I forgive him of his sins, and I have concealed his bad deeds. There is not a single one that I expose with the purpose of heaping shame upon him. Indeed, if I were to expose his misdeeds, his family and others would disassociate from him.'"* This Hadith was narrated by Ibn Mardawyh, Al-Bayhaqi, Ad-Daylami, and Ibn An-Najjar [See As-Suyuti, *Ad-Durr Al Manthur*, vol. 6, p. 525.

One of the greatest blessings we enjoy is that Allah conceals our own affairs from people. If you give anyone the choice to know the private affairs of people, provided they, in turn, know the details of yours, there is no doubt that no one would agree to do as such.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* clarifies this by saying, 'If all of you were to know each other's personal affairs, you would no longer bury each other!' That is to say, if people come to know hidden affairs of a person, they will disassociate from him and when he dies, there will be no one to bury him. They might even be so disgusted with him so as to say, 'Leave him for the dogs to eat. It is a fitting recompense for what he has done.'

Yet, as Allah conceals the details of our personal affairs, we find that even a person's enemy is willing to fulfil the service of carrying him to his final resting place or burying him. Someone has been quoted as saying, 'Death removes all of the causes of animosity between us.' Conversely, prying into the unsightly aspects of others' lives and trying to dig up their personal secrets reveals a gross level of stupidity of an individual. Would you like for people to treat you the same way: to seek your personal secrets and search for your faults?

Indeed, one misdeed that people come to know about you is enough to make them completely overlook all of your good deeds. However, Allah *the Almighty* desires that human beings mutually benefit from one another, for this is crucial in order to enhance the lives of all members of a community.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse saying: 'Yet some people argue about Allah, without knowledge or guidance or an illuminating scripture.' (*Luqman*: 20)

The word *mujadala* (arguing) signifies that there are two parties who argue about a certain matter in which neither of them is convinced of the other party's opinion. Argument is meant to lead to the truth. When an argument fulfils this fundamental condition, it becomes what we refer to as a 'real debate': one which can be judged on an objective basis and in which there is not any recalcitrance simply for its sake. Such debate is judged according to knowledge, guidance and a light giving revelation. In order to enrich this debate, each side provides his arguments. In this connection, we should call to mind the statement of

Allah *Glorified is He*: 'And otherwise do not argue with the followers of earlier revelation except in the most kindly manner ...' (*al-'Ankabut*: 46).

At the other end of the spectrum, we have the debate in which each party desires to simply make his opinion superior, even if it is a false one. This is nothing but a display of sophistry and glimmering rhetoric which leads to nothing worthwhile.

The word *jadal* (argument) is derived from the word *jadl* which refers to something that is intertwined as when something is intertwined with a counterpart causing it to become stronger. Thus, in debate, the argument of one side is supposed to strengthen the argument of the other. The goal of both sides is to arrive at the truth. In other words, the only thing being sought in a real debate is the reinforcement and demonstration of truth.

As we pointed out, whenever an argument is not characterised by the principles mentioned here, it is limited to being an emotional dispute in which the goal of each side is simply to raise its banner, whether true or false.

In the verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* makes it clear that some people love to argue about Him without knowledge, guidance, or recourse to a Divine Book. For example, they passionately argue: Does creation really have a living god? If it does, in fact, have a living god, is He one or divisible? If this living god is present, does he know the minute details of affairs or simply their major aspects? Is He devoted to controlling His dominion at all times? Or, has He created inexorable laws, leaving them to regulate the outcome of affairs within creation? This last argument would entail that Allah *Glorified is He* only exercised His authority over creation one time only!

Allah *the Exalted* is the Sustainer of all existence and is unceasingly controlling the affairs of creation. This is evidenced by the miracles He decreed for His messengers, which defied the natural laws that ostensibly govern the cosmos in order to demonstrate the truthfulness of the Divine Messages communicated by the messengers of Allah to their respective people. Indeed, a good example of this is the well-known story of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* in which his people attempted to burn him alive. If it was meant only for saving Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* from perishing in the fire, Allah would not have allowed them to seize him in the first place, or He could have

allowed them to apprehend him and even attempt to burn him, but then sent rain to douse the flames, thereby frustrating their plan. Then again, it was Allah's Will that they would build a fire and would throw Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* into it, only to watch him emerge unscathed so that they could be eyewitnesses to this miracle which defied natural law. In divesting fire of its most essential property—the ability to burn and consume—Allah was thwarting their argument and cutting off the pretext that would grant them the opportunity to mislead people. For indeed, if Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* would have been rescued and removed from their clutches, they would have said to people, 'If he we had him, we would have done this and that to him.'

The phrase 'without knowledge or guidance' (*Luqman*: 20) which appears in the verse refers to definite knowledge that which is real and enables its possessor to offer evidence concerning its soundness. If you believe wholeheartedly in something which is not real, this is not referred to as knowledge. On the contrary, this is called ignorance. An ignorant person is not the opposite of one who possesses knowledge because an ignorant person cannot be said to not possess any knowledge; rather, he has knowledge concerning that which is not true. Indeed, an earnest attempt to convince this person about anything will leave one sufficiently worn out. The reason is that he is not simply without knowledge—and thus, ready to learn. Quite the reverse is true, you must first dispel the falsehood that he has settled upon so that truth can take its place. Conversely, the truly unlearned individual has not settled upon anything true or false.

If one has settled upon the truth but is unable to offer proof concerning it, he is like a small child in whose mind the idea that Allah is One has become fixed. To be sure, this is the outcome of his father and/or teacher consistently repeating this formula to him until it reached the status of becoming a fundamental truth in his regard. The proof that he might need to anchor his belief is provided by those who instruct him until he matures and acquires the ability to offer evidence concerning his beliefs.

Knowledge exists at various levels. The first one is intuitive knowledge; this is the knowledge that is arrived at through intuition. For example, when we see a person breathing, we know, intuitively, that he is alive. We also

intuitively know that one is half of two, the sky is above us and the earth is below us, etc.

If you look at the mankind legacy of knowledge, you will find that intuitive knowledge is their foundation. The science of engineering, for instance, is based on principles, the first of which is used as a premise for the second, and the second is used as a premise for the third, and so on.

If you want to trace back the engineering theories, you will inevitably return to the first theory, which is something established intuitively, namely if two straight lines meet, their being adjoined will produce two angles.

Therefore, even the most complicated concatenations of theories, you must return to the first principle, which, as we demonstrated, is something that can be observed within Allah's creation on the basis of intuition. Yet, this needs someone to notice and observe. Regarding this, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'But [then] – how many a sign is there in the heavens and on earth which they pass by [unthinkingly], and on which they turn their backs!' (*Yusuf*: 105).

The saying of Allah, '...Yet some people argue about Allah...' (*Luqman*: 20) refers to their arguing about His existence and attributes despite the fact that they argue '...without knowledge or guidance or an illuminating scripture. ...' (*Luqman*: 20) This verse implies that if debate is conducted on the basis of knowledge, guidance and an illuminating revelation, then there is no harm with it. On the other hand, if a dialogue violates these stipulations, it cannot be properly referred to as a debate. It is a hotly contested battle to trample the position of the other side at all costs. Needless to say, there is no benefit that can be gained by engaging in such disputes.

The meaning of the word guidance—as it appears in this verse—is something which is used in order to draw an inference or arrive at a conclusion. It is like a Bedouin who loses his way in the desert, but once he sees animal droppings or footprints, he regains familiarity with his surroundings and knows that he is on a beaten track. When this Bedouin person was asked to believe in Allah, he used what he saw around him to reason deductively about what he cannot see by saying,⁽¹⁾ 'If

(1) These are the words of Qis ibn Sa'ida ibn `Amr Al-Iyadi, one of the sages of the Arabs and one of their most revered orators before the advent of Islam. He was an archbishop=

you see the camel dung, you know that a camel has passed this way, and if you see a footstep, you know that a person has passed this way. So the heaven with its stars and the earth with its mountain passes and the oceans with their high waves,⁽¹⁾ does not all of this point to the existence of the All-Hearing, All-Seeing?!

When a human being looks at creation and its myriad signs, he will inevitably arrive at the fact that all of these prove the existence of the Creator *Glorified is He*. The idea that creation came from nowhere is preposterous. In addition, none of the people who have rejected Allah as the Creator of the universe has claimed it as his own handiwork. As we pointed out earlier, even the simplest implement could not come into existence without a designer. Consider a glass, for instance; does it come from nothing? Of course, it does not; there must be a designer who conceives of the need for the invention in the first place. In terms of the drinking glass, it was invented after human beings first drank water by lapping it up or sipping out of the palm of their hands. We did not arrive at the use of the glass—in its modern guise of convenience and cleanliness—until a group of intelligent people began to look at the elements available in the universe. Only after this, were they able to design the glass, the transparent vessel out of which we drink. They found that glass could be formed from sand when it was melted in combination with other oxides under high temperatures. This means that a drinking glass which, truthfully, is something we could make do without, only came into existence as the result of someone deploying knowledge, ability, their circumstantial findings, etc.

= in the Church of Najran. He lived a long life and even encountered the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* before he received his call to prophethood. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* met him in the market of `Ukazh. He died 23 B.H. See *Az-Zirikli, Al-AI`alam*, 5/196.

(1) This is an excerpt from a speech that he gave in the market of Ukazh: 'People, hear my words well and lend me an attentive ear, for indeed, you will only benefit if you are attentive. Verily, whoever lives will die, and whoever dies will dematerialise. All things that are bound to come to pass will do so: plants and precipitation, sustenance and provision ... Indeed, the firmament bears revelation, and in the earth are lessons learnt. The sky is intense with darkness, but it contains celestial bodies. The earth contains winding passes, and the seas, waves ...' [*This was mentioned by Al-Bayhaqi in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa* 2/108].

What, then, can be said about the sun which has been radiating creation since Allah originated it? The sun has never neglected to perform its duty or even done so sluggishly for a single day; it has never been in need of maintenance or of having its parts replaced. Does this not warrant being enquired about? Who originated it and created it in this way? This question is especially pertinent given the fact that creating something similar to it is something which is far beyond our capabilities or potential.

This is just a succinct example of how we look upon these phenomena. We take them as signposts which can only lead us to one destination that, indeed, there must be a creator and an originator for the wondrous signs that we observe in the universe. Nevertheless, unaided intellect can never offer details about this creator: Who is He? What is His name? This implies that there must be a process by which Allah discloses information about Himself to some messenger, who, in turn, conveys to us who this Creator is, what He requires of us, what He has prepared for those who obey Him and what He has prepared for those who disobey Him.

Bear in mind that there is a marked difference between understanding something as a concept and being able to assign positive qualities to that which I understand. In fact, it is the failure to separate the two that has vexed philosophers. My conceptual understanding that creation, by necessity, must have an Originator is the result of my observing it. The nearly futile attempt at assigning positive qualities to this originator occurs when I begin to ponder: Who is this originator? What is His name? How would one describe Him? What are His Attributes? Sufficient answers to these questions cannot be provided by the intellect; only messengers sent by the One Creator, Allah, can furnish this information.

As always, before using an analogy as a teaching tool, we like to make it clear that even the most elevated similitude can never truly describe the Glory of Allah. I have previously told you an analogical scenario. Assume, for example, that we were sitting inside a locked room and then heard someone knock on the door. Everyone agrees that there is someone knocking at the door; however, they disagree in their attempts to qualify the one knocking. Someone might say, 'It is a man', while another might say, 'It's a child.' Some might maintain

that it is a woman, some might say that it is a person who has come to bring us good news, and yet others might think that it is someone who comes to give them a warning (about something).'

As such, it can be said that as for the idea that there is someone knocking at the door, we are all in agreement. Nevertheless, our disagreement occurs when we attempt to imagine how, who or what this 'knocker' is. In spite of our actions to the contrary, a much more intelligent approach for us in this situation is to simply ask, 'Who is it?' This gives the one knocking at the door the opportunity to tell us about himself: Who he is, why he has come, etc. He could end our senseless bickering.

Allah *Glorified is He* informs us about Himself by means of the person He selects as His messenger who is qualified and prepared to receive His Revelation. Allah does not send His Revelation to every person directly.

We elucidated this meaning previously by giving the example of an electric light bulb or a radio that does not tolerate a direct electrical charge. Therefore, it needs a transistor or similar device that emits electrical charge suitable to it. If this process (of using the transistor) is ignored, the radio will be damaged. Thus, even in the material world there must be a process by which power is transmitted from stronger to weaker objects.

Allah *the Almighty* prepares certain persons from amongst mankind to receive His Revelation and convey it to others. Allah speaks to the angels who convey the speech of Allah to the messengers whom He selects from amongst mankind. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'It is not for any human being that Allah should speak to him except by revelation ...' (*ash-Shura*: 51).

If Allah *the Exalted* speaks directly to all people, what is the need for messengers? When 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* was asked, 'Have you known your Lord through Muhammad or Muhammad through your Lord?' He said, 'If I say that I have known my Lord through Muhammad, it means that Muhammad is a more compelling reason (to submit to Allah) than Allah Himself. If I say that I have known Muhammad through my Lord, what is the reason for sending messengers? I have known my Lord through my Lord Himself, and then Muhammad conveyed what my Lord enjoins on me.' Therefore, a messenger is utmost needed.

Allah *Glorified is He* gives us an example which clarifies this matter in His saying about Prophet Musa (Moses): '...My Lord, show me [Yourself] that I may look at You ...' (*al-A'raf*: 143). Allah *the Exalted* responded to him by saying: '[Allah] said, "You will not see Me"...' (*al-A'raf*: 143). Allah did not say, 'I cannot be seen.' This means that if Allah prepared Musa (Moses) to see Him, he would be able to see him. This is proven by the fact that in the Hereafter we will be prepared to see Allah *Glorified is He*: '[Some] faces, that Day, will be radiant, looking at their Lord.' (*al-Qiyama*: 22-23)

Allah *the Almighty* says about disbelievers who will be prevented from seeing Him: 'No! Indeed, from their Lord, that Day, they will be partitioned.' (*al-Mutaffifin*: 15)

When Allah *Glorified is He* appeared to the mountain, which is created from a material stronger and more rigid than that of Musa (Moses), the mountain collapsed. Once Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* looked at this mountain, he fell unconscious. What would happen if he looked directly at Allah?

Whenever Allah *the Almighty* wills to address one of His created beings or appear to them, He prepares and strengthens him for this. Allah said about Musa (Moses): '...you would be brought up under My eye.' (*Ta Ha*: 39) Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'I made you for myself' (*Ta Ha*: 41). Then, the person who was prepared by Allah cultivates and teaches people what he has learnt from Him.

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* educated his nation for a period of twenty-three years. If Allah were to speak directly to every person individually, this would inevitably consume a large period of time. Therefore, Allah *the Most High* chooses messengers and gives them special characteristics which enable them to cultivate and educate the nations after they themselves have been cultivated and educated by Him.

Sending messengers to convey Allah's Message is inevitable. They give detailed answers about people's questions concerning Allah: 'Who is He?' 'What is His Name?' 'What are His Attributes?' 'What does He demand of us?' 'What has he prepared for those who obey Him?' 'What has He prepared for those who disobey him?' Therefore, the first evidence on the falsity of associating partners with Allah is to ask the person who worships the sun,

moon, or any idol, 'What do these things ask you to do? If you are unable to be provided with a response to this question, why do you worship these objects?' The true meaning of worship is that a worshipper should fulfil the commands and abstain from the prohibitions of the one he worships.

Then, why do these people willingly worship these things? It is because religiousness is something inherent to humans. We previously clarified that every single person has something inherited from Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* which is his innate nature. This innate nature testifies to the covenant made with Allah: '...Am I not your Lord?' (*al-A'raf*: 172) If you manage to keep this innate nature pure and bright by following the Path of your Creator and nourishing your body with things that He has made lawful, Allah *the Almighty* will illumine your face and insight.

This explains the meaning of the following Hadith: 'The servant of Allah may complain, "I have supplicated Allah, but my supplication has not been answered." How can his supplication be answered while his food, drink, and clothes are gained through unlawful means?'⁽¹⁾ This person has destroyed his pure innate nature has along with neglecting the law by which he can maintain it. Allah *Glorified is He* says regarding this: '...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)

'Depressed life' and we seek refuge in Allah from this, results from the lack of faith and loss of the purity of the innate nature which testifies that Allah is our Lord. If you maintained it, the religious teachings and instructions

(1) Related by Muslim in his *Sahih* (1015) on the authority of Abu Hurayra who said that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Allah the Almighty is Good and accepts only that which is good. Verily Allah has commanded believers to do that which He has commanded the messengers. So the Almighty says, "O, (you) messengers! Eat of the tayyibat [all kinds of halal (legal) foods], and perform righteous deeds." (*al-Mu'minun*: 51) and the Almighty says, "O, you who believe! Eat of the lawful things that We have provided you." (*al-Baqara*: 172) Then Prophet Muhammad mentioned [the case] of a man who, having journeyed far, is disheveled and dusty, and who spreads out his hands to the sky saying, "O, Lord! O, Lord!", while his food is unlawful, his drink is unlawful, his clothing is unlawful, and he has been nourished with unlawful, so how can [his supplication] be answered?'

would become clear and you would not lead a distressed life which results from the negligence of the Path of Allah. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'O you who have believed, if you fear Allah, He will grant you a criterion ...' (*al-Anfal*: 29). This means that Allah *the Almighty* will give one light and criterion, which will guide and enable him to distinguish between the Truth and falsehood.

Allah *the Exalted* clarifies the two matters which obscure the natural inclination towards faith: heedlessness about which Allah says: '...lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, "Indeed, we were unaware of this."' (*al-A'raf*: 172) The second matter is the exemplar: 'It was only that our fathers associated [others in worship] with Allah before, and we were but descendants after them ...' (*al-A'raf*: 173).

Therefore, heedlessness towards Allah's religious teachings obscures the natural inclination towards faith, while producing a generation that does not adhere to the Path of Allah. The first generation neglects the Path of Allah, and the successive generations will be also heedless and have a bad example to follow. In addition, a bad pattern and heedlessness increase more and more with the passage of successive generations. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* sends messengers one after another in order to remove heedlessness and provide people with good examples, so that they can compare between the Path and religious teachings of Allah and the different paths others take.

Thus, whoever desires to dispute about Allah *the Exalted* should present his argument on the basis of knowledge, guidance and a light-giving Book that has been revealed by Allah. The Book is described as 'light-giving' because it is ascribed to Allah. However, this light can be obscured if it is exposed to distortion, alteration, and forgetfulness.

Allah *Glorified is He* described these various phases when He says: 'So when they forgot that by which they had been reminded ...' (*al-An'am*: 44).

Allah also says: '...those who conceal what We sent down of clear proofs and guidance ...' (*al-Baqara*: 159).

People are pardoned for forgetfulness, but they are not pardoned for concealing Allah's Guidance. Those who do not fall into forgetfulness and

concealment of Allah's sayings fall into distortion: '...those who distort words from their [proper] usages...' (*al-Ma'ida*: 13). In addition, they fabricate sayings and ascribed them to Allah: 'so woe to those who write the "scripture" with their own hands, then say, "This is from Allah"...' (*al-Baqara*: 79). All of the four ways of obscuring the Book of Allah were done by the Jews.

The books they currently have are not suitable for arguing about Allah because they lack knowledge, guidance, and decisive evidence. They also do not fall into the category of 'illuminating books', which are absolutely free of errors resulting from forgetfulness, concealment, distortion, and fabrication.

Thus, whoever desires to debate about Allah should do so on the basis of intuitive knowledge, deductive reasoning, or illuminating book. There are many Divine Books: the Scriptures of Ibrahim (Abraham) and Musa (Moses), the scriptures of former people, the Psalms of Dawud (David), the Torah that was revealed to Musa (Moses) and the Gospel that was revealed to 'Isa (Jesus). All of these are Divine Books, but they experienced the factors that obscure their light and guidance due to the desires and delusions of people. This resulted from the delusion of temporal power which has the greatest impact on the distortion of scripture.

In fact, the delusion of temporal power prevented the Jews from believing Prophet Muhammad although they knew that he would come from the lands of Arabs, and they also knew his characteristics, the time he would be sent and that he is the seal of messengers. Therefore, the Quran says about them: '...Those to whom We gave the Scripture know him as they know their own sons ...' (*al-An'am*: 20). He also says about them: '...a party of them conceal the truth while they know [it].' (*al-Baqara*: 146)

'Abdullah ibn Sallam said his famous statement about Prophet Muhammad, 'By Allah, I recognised him as soon I saw him, in the manner I know my own son. As a matter of fact, I was more certain of his identity than that of my son!'⁽¹⁾

(1) *It is narrated on the authority of Umar that he asked 'Abdullah ibn Salam, 'Are you as certain about Muhammad's identity as that of your own son?' He said, 'Certainly, Al-Amin [Jibril (Gabriel)] descended onto the one who is deemed trustworthy from amongst mankind. I knew him from his description (which had been mentioned in earlier scripture). I am unable to say exactly what his mother may have been doing at the time that he was conceived.' This was mentioned by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir (1/194).*

The Quran says that the Jews were awaiting the arrival of Prophet Muhammad so that they could secure their dominance over disbelievers. They said to disbelievers that there would be a new time in which a prophet would come, and they would dominate them and kill them, as the people of `Ad and Aram were killed.'⁽¹⁾ The Quran says: '...And when there came to them a Book from Allah confirming that which was with them - although before they used to pray for victory against those who disbelieved - but [then] when there came to them that which they recognised, they disbelieved in it; so the curse of Allah will be upon disbelievers.' (*al-Baqara*: 89)

They knew that the new prophet would take from them the status that they had enjoyed and their dominance in the fields of knowledge, economics, war, etc. In fact, they were preparing someone to be⁽²⁾ the king of Medina at the night of Prophet Muhammad's migration. As Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* entered the city, leadership belonged solely to him, so the new king was rejected.

All the Divine Books have been distorted and altered, for Allah *Glorified is He* has not guaranteed that they will be preserved in the manner He guaranteed that He would preserve the Quran. This highlights the esteem of the seal of prophets. The Divine Books which preceded the Quran contained legal rulings and were not miracles. The previous messengers were granted miracles apart from the scriptures they were given; the miracles of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* for instance, were the stick, the hand, etc. His book and the religious instructions that he was calling to were represented in the Torah. The miracles of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* were curing the blind and the leper and giving life to the dead by permission of Allah, and His Book and religious instructions were represented in the Gospel.

As for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the Quran represented his miracle, Book and religious instructions. The Quran represents a

(1) This was mentioned by Ibn Kathir in his *Tafsir* (1/124). It was worded by Ibn Is-haq from some of the learned individuals from among the Ansar (Medinan helpers).

(2) This is a reference to `Abdullah ibn Ubay ibn Salul. Sa`ad ibn Ubada said to Prophet Muhammad, 'By Allah, before He granted us the special favour of being your followers and blessed us with your arrival, we were actually about to crown `Abdullah ibn Ubay and make him a king.' [Stated by Al-Bayhaqi in *Dala'il An-Nubuwwa* (2/500)]

miracle and contains religious instructions that will remain until the Last Hour as it is the last Message.

Concerning previous prophetic messages, the miracles were temporary and were specific to those who witnessed them and lived at the time when they occurred. If Allah did not inform us about these miracles, we would not know anything about them and would not believe them. We previously likened this situation to a match which burns once in front of the person who has seen it, but afterward, this incident becomes a report. Although we believe in the miracles of Musa (Moses), we did not witness them.

Since previous Divine Books contained religious teachings and were not considered as miracles, Allah *Glorified is He* entrusted the duty of preserving them to the people who believed in them. This duty is considered as a moral obligation which may be obeyed or disobeyed; some people disobeyed Allah by neglected the duty to preserve the Divine Book, causing distortion to these Books.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Indeed, We sent down the Torah, in which was guidance and light. The prophets who submitted [to Allah] judged by it for the Jews, as did the rabbis and scholars by that with which they were entrusted of the Scripture of Allah ...’ (*al-Ma’ida*: 44).

When an Arabic verb begins with the letters *hamza*, *sin* and *ta*, this means that it is used as a request; the verb *istahfazhtuka* means ‘ask you to preserve something’ and the verb *istafhamtuka* means ‘ask you to understand something’. Other verbs should be understood in the same way such as *istakhrajt* and *istawdaht*, etc.

When people were asked to preserve the Divine Books but failed to do as such, Allah *the Almighty* assumed the responsibility of preserving the Quran, as He says: ‘Indeed, it is We who sent down the Quran, and indeed, We will be its guardian.’ (*al-Hijr*: 9). Therefore, the Quran has remained the way it was revealed without any distortion; nothing has been added to it or removed from it. Allah spoke the Truth when He said at the beginning of the chapter of *al-Baqara*: ‘This is the Book about which there is no doubt...’ (*al-Baqara*: 2). There will be no doubt concerning this Book until the Last Hour. In fact, even

the enemies of the Quran acknowledge its authenticity, regarding it as the only authenticated religious text.

One of the remarkable matters about the preservation of the Quran is that in most cases one preserves something in order to be evidence for him. For instance, a person may preserve a bill of exchange in order for it to be proof for him. Allah *the Exalted* has guaranteed the preservation of the Quran while it contains information concerning matters which will materialise in the future. Allah *the Almighty* preserves these matters as He is sure that they are true and will materialise in the future. Hence, Allah's preservation of the Quran means that nothing will contradict it: '...If it had been from [any] other than Allah, they would have found within it much contradiction.' (*an-Nisa*: 82).

We said previously that the Quran has decided upon some things which will take place in the future, concerning that which people are offered the right to choose. Regarding this, people's choices correspond to what the Quran has already decided although they belie and disbelieve in it. However, they never act in a manner contrary to Allah's Decree.

How do you deal with a person who debates about Allah without knowledge, guidance or a light-giving book? We should draw their attention to knowledge, guidance and the light-giving book.

We should ask them to look at the signs which Allah has created and the axioms which prove the existence of the Creator *Glorified is He*. We should also call them to guidance and ask them to reflect upon the miracle which accompanied Prophet Muhammad: the Quran, It reports the siege imposed by the disbelievers of Mecca on Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Muslims so that they were forced to eat carrion and tree leaves at times.

The Quran stated during this time: '[Their] assembly will be defeated, and they will turn their backs [in retreat].' (*al-Qamar*: 45) This statement was so surprising that 'Umar exclaimed: 'which assembly is this referring to, for we are not even able to take care of ourselves?' When he witnessed the defeat that befell the disbelievers on the Day of Badr, he said, 'Allah is Truthful, as He says: "[Their] assembly will be defeated, and they will turn their backs [in retreat]''. (*al-Qamar*: 45)

The Quran says about Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira⁽¹⁾: ‘We will brand him upon the snout.’ (*al-Qalam*: 16) Actually, on the Day of Badr, people were only able to identify Al-Walid from amongst the dead by a mark upon his snout.⁽²⁾

In addition, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* specified the places where many warriors would die before the battle commenced.⁽³⁾ When the battle had ended, they found that the people who were named by Prophet Muhammad died exactly at these places he specified.

Allah *Glorified is He* has given many proofs in the Quran concerning the fact that it is a Book that illumines the past, present and future. We previously mentioned that the unseen is concealed by the veils of time or space. This means that the preceding incidents are concealed by the veils of the past, and the coming incidents are concealed by the veils of the future. The incidents which take place around you at present are concealed by the veil of space. Moreover, a person may be meeting another in a room, but each one of them does not the real and hidden intentions of the other.

Allah *Glorified is He* removed these veils for His Messenger Muhammad. For example, before the battle of Mu'ta,⁽⁴⁾ Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings*

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- (1) Ibn Hajar stated in his book entitled ‘*Al-Fath*’ (8/662): There is some difference of opinion concerning who was intended by this revelation. In his *Tafsir*, Yahya ibn Salam mentioned that it referred to Walid ibn Al-Mughira. However, it is also said that it refers to Al-Aswad ibn ‘Abd Yaghuth. The latter of these opinions was stated by Sanid ibn Dawud in his *Tafsir*. Al-Suhayli said on the authority of Al-Qutaybi that Al-Akhnas ibn Shariq is the one to whom the verse refers.
 - (2) It was narrated on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas that he made a statement concerning the verse: ‘Cruel, moreover, and an illegitimate pretender.’ (*al-Qalam*: 13). He said, ‘This refers to a man from Quraysh who had surplus money as the result of extra livestock he owned and had earned notability thereby.’ As-Suyuti mentioned in *Ad-Durr Al-Mamthur* (8/249): This was related by Al-Bukhari, An-Nasa’i, Ibn Abu Hatim, Ibn Mardawiyh and Abu Na’im. In relation to the verse: “We will brand him upon the snout.” (*al-Qalam*: 16). Ibn ‘Abbas also mentioned that it refers to someone who fought at Badr and was branded on his nose, but he did not mention Walid ibn Al-Mughira.
 - (3) Related by Muslim in his *Sahih* (1779) from a Hadith that was narrated by Anas Allah be pleased with him and Ahmad in his *Musnad* (3/219, 258) that Prophet Muhammad said, ‘This is the place where so-and-so will die.’ Afterward, he placed his hand on the ground and said, ‘Right here, right here.’ The narrator of the Hadith then added, ‘None of them exceeded the places Prophet Muhammad had marked.’
 - (4) The Battle of Mu'ta occurred during the month of Jumada Al-Ula in 7 A.H. Mu'ta is the name of a town in the region of Balqa' in the Levant. This battle is also referred to as=

be upon him decided to remain in Medina, but as he dispatched his army he instructed them on of the matter of carrying the flag and defined the Companions who would carry the flag in case of its carrier's death. The Prophet selected the first three persons then said, 'When these persons are killed, you should choose someone from amongst yourselves to carry the flag.'⁽¹⁾

After the battle commenced, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* sat with his companions in Medina and described it in detail. When the army returned from Mu'ta, the Prophet and his companions in Medina found that the battle actually took place as Prophet Muhammad had described.

This reveals the reason for naming the battle of Mu'ta as a *ghazwa*, for this name refers to the battles in which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* took part. As for the other battles in which he did not take part, they were called *sariyya*. When Prophet Muhammad described to the Muslims the course of the battle, the Muslims considered him present on the battlefield, so they referred to it as a *ghazwa*.

Even more remarkably, Allah *Glorified is He* informed His Messenger the inner thoughts and feelings of his people⁽²⁾: 'Why does Allah not punish us for what we say?' (*al-Mujadala*: 8)

These instances reveal that the Quran encompasses the past, present and future.

= *Battle of Al-Umara'*. It was an intense battle: Ja'afar ibn Abu Taleb, Zayd ibn Al-Haritha, and 'Abdullah ibn Rawaha were all martyred. They fought the Romans in this battle.

- (1) Related by Al-Bukhari in his *Sahih* (4262) and Al-Bayhaqi in *Dala'il An-Nubuwwah* (4/366); in the narration, Prophet Muhammad announced their deaths before news of their deaths reached anyone in Medina.
- (2) In his *Tafsir* (4/323), Ibn Kathir mentioned, 'They do this and covertly twist the meaning of what they say and make it seem as if they are sending greetings of peace (upon the Prophet) when actually they are cursing him. This led them to say amongst themselves, "If he is really a prophet, Allah will punish us for what we secretly intend when speaking to him if Allah really knows what our hearts conceal. If he is really a Prophet, Allah will punish us in the worldly life for what we secretly say about him." Allah *Glorified is He* responded to them by saying: '... Sufficient for them is Hell, which they will [enter to] burn and wretched is the destination.' (*al-Mujadala*: 8)

Allah Glorified is He says:

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ اتَّبِعُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا بَلْ نَتَّبِعُ مَا وَجَدْنَا عَلَيْهِ
ءَابَاءَنَا أَوْ لَوْ كَانَ الشَّيْطَانُ يَدْعُوهُمْ إِلَى عَذَابِ السَّعِيرِ ﴿٢١﴾

When they are told, ‘Follow what God has sent down,’ they say: ‘We shall follow what we saw our forefathers following.’

What! Even if Satan is calling them to the suffering of the Blazing Flame? [21] (The Quran, *Luqman*: 21)

The phrase, ‘...what Allah has sent down...’ (*Luqman*: 21) generally refers to all revealed scriptures. The closest meaning can be the following: Adhere to the Books that Allah has revealed to the messengers in whom you believe. If you do so, you will acknowledge the truth of Muhammad’s Message.

An alternative way of understanding the meaning of this part of the verse which reads, ‘...what Allah has sent down...’ (*Luqman*: 21), is that it is a command to correct their affairs by thinking deeply about Islam.

They rejected this call and refused to adhere to what Allah revealed. They said, ‘...We shall follow what we saw our forefathers following...’ (*Luqman*: 21). In another verse, they said, ‘Rather, we will follow that which we found our fathers doing ...’ (*al-Baqara*: 170).

The apparent similarity of these verses leads us to ask, ‘What is the difference between the Arabic verb *wajadna*, which is used in the former verse and *alfayna*, which is used in the latter verse?’ Some scholars point out that those who were addressed had spent varying lengths of time in the company of their forefathers, so they were affected by their forefathers in different ways: Some of them had lived with their forefathers and followed them in for a short length of time, while others had lived with their forefathers for long periods of time. Therefore, they became familiar with the ways of their forefathers. Therefore, the Quran used two different verbs *wajadna* and *alfayna* to express the same meaning.

The second difference between the two verses is noticed at their ends. One of the verses ends with the following: ‘...Even though their fathers

reason nothing, nor were they guided?' (*al-Baqara*: 170) The other verse ends with the following '...even though their fathers knew nothing, nor were they guided?' (*al-Ma'ida*: 104)

What is the difference between the Arabic verbs *ya'qilun* and *ya'lamun*? The verb *ya'qil* refers to a person who is capable of reasoning and deducing things. If he does not have a deductive mind, he relies on the deductions of others. Therefore, knowledge is a more comprehensive and inclusive than reason because reason knows only what a person deduces, whereas knowledge encompasses what a person deduces as well as what he learns from others. Hence, the verse in which Allah says *ya'lamun* (know) includes the meaning of *ya'qilun* (reason).

If the use of reason is negated, it does not necessarily mean that the possession of knowledge in general is negated because you may benefit from others' reasoning and deductions. For example, a simple countryman can use the television and could watch various channels despite the fact that he inherently knows nothing about the nature of this machine, and someone has taught him how to use the television. Therefore, a person knows things by reasoning them and by accepting what is deduced by reasoning. Thus, negating the possession of knowledge indicates extreme ignorance, which cannot be rectified and changed.

We also notice that Allah says: '...We shall follow what we saw our forefathers following...' (*Luqman*: 21). In another verse, Allah says: '...Sufficient for us is that upon which we found our fathers ...' (*al-Ma'ida*: 104). The former verse indicates the possibility of them adhering to the truth, as denial of the truth is not severe. However, the subsequent verse indicates that they found what their forefathers followed sufficient for them, so they do not need anything else. This indicates severe denial of the Truth. Thus, in the former verse, Allah negates their use of reason while in the subsequent example Allah negates their knowledge of anything. This proves that the end of each verse is suitable to its beginning.

Allah *Glorified is He* says at the end of the following verse: '...What! Even if Satan is calling them to the suffering of the Blazing Flame' (*Luqman*: 21).

This means that the insinuations of Satan were the primary cause which led to their forefathers' idolatry and disbelief. In this case, Satan is a common denominator between them and their forefathers. This suggests that enticement toward evil can come from oneself or result in both cases in the effacement of the light of faith and that of the religious instructions.

We previously clarified the difference between disobedience to Allah is caused by you own self and that which is caused by Satan; Satan desires that you always disobey Allah. If you resist his temptation in regard to a particular act of disobedience, he will try to tempt you to commit a different act of disobedience.

However, the *nafs* (self) desires a particular act of disobedience to which it is inclined. Therefore, relinquishing it becomes very difficult. Every person has a particular weakness or an appetite that he favours. Through practice and experience, some people have learnt other peoples' weaknesses and how to make use of these weaknesses in order to exploit these people.

We see that many people who commit acts of disobedience blame Satan only. For instance, one of them may say (after an act of disobedience) that has tempted him and does not blame himself for committing it. The idea of regarding Satan responsible for each act of disobedience is negated by the Hadith: 'When the month of *Ramadan* comes, the doors of Paradise are opened, the doors of Hell are closed and devils are confined.'⁽¹⁾

If devils were the source of all acts of disobedience, we would not find any act of obedience or crime committed during *Ramadan*. As these acts of disobedience are committed, this means that there is a reason other than Satan that causes them since devils are confined during *Ramadan*.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

(1) Related by Muslim in his *Sahih* (1079) and Ahmad in his *Musnad* (2/357) from a Hadith narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.

وَمَنْ يُسَلِّمْ وَجْهَهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ فَقَدْ
 اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ عَاقِبَةُ الْأُمُورِ ﴿٢٢﴾

**Whoever directs himself wholly to God and does
 good work has grasped the surest handhold, for
 the outcome of everything is with God [22]
 (The Quran, *Luqman*: 22)**

This verse means that a person who wants to save himself from arguing without knowledge, guidance and a light-giving scripture should direct himself wholly to Allah, as He says in another verse: ‘(Satan) said, "By your might, I will surely mislead them all.”’ (*Sad*: 82) Then, he made an exception: ‘Except, among them, Your chosen servants.’ (*al-Hijr*: 40)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...directs himself wholly to Allah...’ (*Luqman*: 22). This verse means that the one who surrenders completely and sincerely to Allah without associating any partners with Him and who is in the accompaniment of Him, Satan will not tempt him. In fact, Satan tries to tempt the inattentive people. Therefore, one can be saved from the temptation of Satan when he surrenders completely to Allah.

For example, when a small child is accompanied by his father, none of his peers will attempt to attack him. However, if he walks alone, he will be vulnerable to their attack. If a servant of Allah abstains from being in the accompaniment of Him, he will be vulnerable to the temptation and insinuations of Satan. This meaning is also expressed in Allah’s saying: ‘Yes [on the contrary], whoever submits his face in Islam to Allah ...’ (*al-Baqara*: 112).

However, there is a slight difference between the verse stated in the chapter of *al-Baqara* and the verse stated in the the chapter of *Luqman*: In the chapter of *al-Baqarah*, the word *lillah* is mentioned, but in the chapter of *Luqman*, the words *ila Allah* are mentioned. The Arabic preposition *ila* (to) means that the ultimate objective is Allah. This objective requires a guide which helps you to reach it. However, the Arabic preposition *li* indicates an immediate and direct arrival to Alla, which can only be attained with the highest levels of sincerity.

Allah's saying, 'Whoever directs himself wholly to Allah...' (*Luqman*: 22) indicates that one follows the path which leads to Allah as he fulfils the obligations enjoined by Him.

An example of surrendering completely to Allah was stated by the Queen of Sheba: '...I submit with Sulaiman (Solomon) to Allah, Lord of the worlds.' (*an-Naml*: 44) These words were uttered by the Queen; she did not say, 'I have surrendered myself to Sulaiman (Solomon).' Rather, she said, 'I submit with Sulaiman (Solomon) to Allah.' (*an-Naml*: 44) There is no objection to what she said.

Surrendering completely to Allah or observing sincerity to Him entails tremendous effort on behalf of a worshipper. A soul can never be completely free of lapses and mistakes. Actually there are many cases in which a person may outwardly seem sincere to Allah, but as soon as the love for reputation enters his heart, his action becomes tainted with ostentation, even if it is slight.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has alleviated this burden and has given us something which the heart of every Muslim should find contentment. He said in his supplication, 'O, Allah, I seek Your Forgiveness for every action I began solely seeking Your contentment, but might have become influenced by other factors.'⁽¹⁾

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is not in need of this supplication to remedy personal failings; however, Allah *Glorified is He* taught him this supplication for removing hardship from his *ummah* (followers of Islam). Allah *the Exalted* also alleviated the burden of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when He said: 'We know that you, [O, Muhammad] are saddened by what they say. And indeed, they do not call you untruthful...' (*al-An'am*: 33). This means that Prophet Muhammad is more honourable and should never be considered as a common liar. '...they do not call you untruthful, but it is the verses of Allah that the wrongdoers reject.' (*al-An'am*: 33)

(1) *Sufyan ibn Al-Uyayna said, 'Mutraf ibn `Abdullah said the following supplications sometimes, "O, Allah, I seek Your Forgiveness for the things for which I have repented and then fallen back into. Forgive me for the things I intended to do, but failed to be committed to it. O Allah, I seek Your Forgiveness for things that I did seeking Your contentment, but my heart is affected by other desires, which You know."' This was mentioned by Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali in Jami' Al-'Ulum wal Hikam (p.27) See also Hilyat Al-Awliya' (2/207).*

Allah's says: '...and does good work has grasped the surest handhold ...' (*Luqman*: 22). The word *istamsaka* (grasp) indicates strength and firmness, a meaning which is not indicated by the verb *masaka* (hold).

The first aspect of grasping is that you know that you are weak, so you rely upon Allah's support more firmly. For example, when you descend a mountain, you cling to it firmly so that you do not fall. If you do not cling to it firmly, you will fall. Gripping the mountain firmly indicates that you are sure of your weakness. The only thing that can protect you is the rope to which you must grip tightly. A person who submits entirely to Allah and takes hold of His surest handhold will be saved and protected by Him. The literal meaning of the Arabic word *Al-urwa* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, refers to the handle with which we grasp tankards, mugs or watering vases. This handle differentiates between a mug and a cup, for a mug has handle. The word *wuthqa*, which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means sure or steady. It is also the feminine derivative of the adjective *awthaq* which means strongly attached to something and cannot be separated from it.

The *urwa* (handle) differs according to the one who makes it; if it is made by a dishonest craftsman, it will be so weak and fragile that it may be loosened as soon as you attempt to grip the vessel. This is an unethical business practice as a person may purchase a car at an affordable price only to find its spare parts very expensive.

Making a weak handle benefits the deceitful craftsman. If Allah is the One Who supports the handhold, then it will be the surest and strongest handhold.

Allah says in another verse: 'And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided...' (*Al-Imran*: 103). This verse clarifies that the surest handhold is the Rope of Allah which brings us together. Therefore, a buttonhole on a shirt is called *urwa* because it fastens and brings the garment together so that it does not come part. In another verse, Allah described this *urwa* (handhold) as follows: '...with no break in it ...' (*al-Baqara*: 256).

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says: '...for the outcome of everything is with Allah.' (*Luqman*: 22) This asserts that everything comes back to Allah *the Exalted* and we should believe that He has created us for an important

purpose and that He will not leave us without reckoning: ‘Then did you think that We created you uselessly and that to Us you would not be returned?’ (*al-Mu’minun*: 115) If Allah left us without reckoning, a morally depraved person who satisfies all of his vain desires would have better luck than he who leads his life uprightly and virtuously. Allah *the Most High* does not ever deceive His servant who adheres to His Path.

The ultimate outcome of all events rests with Allah in the Hereafter; however, He allows us to witness some of the consequences of our actions in the worldly life, so that progress and development achieve primacy. This is clarified by making exams for students at the end of the school year to distinguish between the diligent students and their negligent counterparts. If students’ performances were never assessed at the end of the year, all of them would be equal and would neglect their studies. Therefore, there must be recompense for good and bad action, so that life does not become corrupt. Rewarding praiseworthy behaviour and punishing blameworthy behaviour is a well-established practice during the worldly life, so why do some people disapprove of reckoning in the Hereafter?

Is it sensible to believe that this world, which was created by Allah with such perfection, wisdom and exactitude will be left corrupted, and people are not held to account? If this was the end, every believer and upright person will be at loss.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَلَا يَحْزُنكَ كُفْرُهُ ۚ إِلَيْنَا مَرْجِعُهُمْ
فَنُنَبِّئُهُم بِمَا عَمِلُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ ﴿٢٣﴾

As for those who refuse to do this, do not let their refusal sadden you [Prophet] – they will return to Us and We shall tell them what they have done. God knows all that hearts contain [23] (The Quran, *Luqman*: 23)

After Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies that the final outcome of all affairs rests with Him, He willed to console His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. After debating with knowledge, guidance, and light-giving book and clarifying

the importance of surrendering completely to Allah, the Prophet should not let their refusal sadden him.

This clarified Allah knows that His Messenger loves that his *ummah* (followers of Islam or people he was sent) become believers. This also implies he becomes sadden to see any disbeliever from amongst his people he was sent. The Quran conveys this meaning in many verses: 'Then, perhaps you would kill yourself through grief over them, [O, Muhammad], if they do not believe in this message, [and] out of sorrow.' (*al-Kahf*: 6) Allah *the Exalted* also says: 'you would kill yourself with grief that they will not be believers.' (*ash-Shu'ara*: 3) Allah *the Almighty* reassures His Messenger by informing him that the purpose of sending him is to convey the Message. As Prophet Muhammad performed his mission, then this mission was fulfilled. There are many verses that gently blame Prophet Muhammad for saddening for the disbelievers. This Divine blame to Prophet Muhammad is actually in his favour exactly like the situation when a father blames his hard-working son to study more and more, lest his efforts be in vain.

An instance of this is Allah's saying to His Prophet blaming him: 'The Prophet frowned and turned away because the blind man came to him, [interrupting] but what would make you perceive [O, Muhammad] that perhaps he might be purified.' (*Abasa*: 1-3) Allah blames His Prophet for neglecting the believer who had come to him to enquire about some religious matters, and the Prophet went to call the disbelievers who belied him. In so doing, he chose the difficult matter and left the easy one. Hence, this blame was in the interest of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and not against him as some people, who misunderstood this verse, said.

Another example of Allah's blame occurs in His saying: 'O, Prophet, why do you prohibit [yourself from] what Allah has made lawful for you...' (*at-Tahrim*: 1). In this verse, Allah *the Exalted* blames His Prophet because he tightened matters for himself, for he prevented himself from enjoying that which Allah *the Almighty* made lawful for him.⁽¹⁾

(1) In his *Tafsir* (4/386), Ibn Kathir mentioned: 'Substantial debate revolved around determining the occasion in which the starting verse of the chapter of *at-Tahrim* was revealed. It was said that the verse was revealed in relation to Mariyah. It was narrated on the=

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...they will return to Us ...’ (*Luqman*: 23). The verse means that Allah informed His Messenger that if he did not see the negative consequences of those people’s disbelief, they would return to Allah in the Hereafter and would be held accountable. Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: ‘...whether We show you some of what We promise them, [O, Muhammad] ...’ (*Ghafir*: 77). It means that Allah *the Most High* will show His Prophet the consequences of their disbelief. ‘...or We take you in death, it is to Us they will be returned.’ (*Ghafir*: 77)

Therefore, the part of the verse which reads ‘...they will return to Us ...’ (*Luqman*: 23) reveals the ultimate outcome of their affair. Nevertheless, Allah *the Most High* showed His Prophet the signs of his triumph over the disbelievers and the signs of their humiliation and defeat. In fact, this is what happened in the Conquest of Mecca when the Prophet entered Mecca triumphantly but modestly lowering his head.⁽¹⁾

He knew that his victory had come from Allah *the Almighty*. He wanted to convey to the people of Mecca that they wanted power to show arrogance, but he showed modesty due to this power. This is the fundamental difference between how a believer and a disbeliever understand might and honour.

= authority of Anas, who mentioned, "Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was in possession of a maiden with whom he had relations. However, ‘A’isha and Hafsa gave him such a difficult time about this that he eventually treated their relationship as though it were forbidden." The correct narration concerning this verse is that it refers to an occasion in which Prophet Muhammad prohibited himself from consuming honey. It was narrated on the authority of ‘A’isha, who said, “The Prophet was in the habit of eating a particular type of honey with Zaynab bint Jahsh and would spend lengthy periods of time in her company. This led to a secret agreement between Hafsa and me, as we agreed that if the Prophet visited either of us, we would say, "Have you been eating *maghafir* (a type of food which has bad smell)?" Prophet Muhammad said, "I will never eat it again and do not tell anyone about this.""

(1) Ibn Hisham mentions in his book entitled *As-Sirah An-Nabawiyyah* (4/405): ‘Once Prophet Muhammad came to the site of Dhu Tawa. He rode his mount, and he was wearing a turban without an extremity (made of Yemeni cloth) and a reddish shawl. The only thing Prophet Muhammad could do after witnessing the Conquest of Mecca is to lower his head in humility. As a matter of fact, his head was so inclined that his beard nearly touched the riding animal.’ Although the generic term ‘beard’ was used in the excerpt above, it specifically refers to the hair which grows underneath the chin. It is also said that the word ‘beard’—as it appears here—can refer to the hair upon the jaw.

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was able to do after he had fully secured the ability to do whatever he wanted to do with them—after they annoyed and troubled him extremely—he gathered them and said his famous statement, ‘O, people of Quraysh, what do you think I am going to do with you?’ They replied, ‘Good! You are a magnanimous man and the son of a magnanimous man.’ Then he said, ‘Go. You are free.’⁽¹⁾

It is worth noting that the style changes from singular in ‘*man kafar fala yahzunka*’ (do not let their refusal sadden you) to plural in ‘*ilayna marji’uhum*’ (they will return to Us). This is because *man* is an Arabic relative pronoun, which can be used either in the plural or in the singular form.

Allah’s saying, ‘...We shall tell them what they have done...’ (*Luqman*: 23) indicates that Allah records all their actions. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘...Allah had enumerated it, while they forgot it ...’ (*al-Mujadala*: 6). Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘...Allah knows all that hearts contain.’ (*Luqman*: 23) This refers to the hidden thoughts which have not been turned into a saying or an action. Allah knows the envy, hatred, enmity, and conspiracy against Prophet Muhammad.

The word *aleem*, which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse is an Arabic hyperbole. There is a difference between the word ‘*alim*’ and ‘*aleem*’: ‘*alim*’ refers to an entity than has knowledge, but ‘*aleem*’ refers to an entity that has full knowledge which has not been acquired from anyone. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...over every possessor of knowledge is one [more] knowing.’ (*Yusuf*: 76)

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

نُمَتِّعُهُمْ قَلِيلًا ثُمَّ نَضْطَرُّهُمْ إِلَىٰ عَذَابٍ غَلِيظٍ ﴿٢٤﴾

**We let them enjoy themselves for a little while, but We shall
drive them to a harsh torment [24] (The Quran, *Luqman*: 24)**

Allah clarifies to believers that they should not be deceived by the apparent affluence, well-being, and power that disbelievers may enjoy because this is

(1) This was mentioned by Ibn Hisham in his book *As-Sirah An-Nabawiyyah* (4/412): 'After the Conquest of Mecca, Prophet Muhammad said, "O, people of Quraysh, what do you think I am going to do with you?" They replied, "Good! You are a magnanimous man and the son of a magnanimous man." Then, he said, "Go. You are free."'

transitory enjoyment. Allah *Glorified is He* wants that the followers of prophets to have faith without having the intention to gain worldly advantages.

We previously clarified a way you can separate in the principle of truth and that of falsehood. The one who seeks the Truth is willing to sacrifice for his principle, while the one who seeks falsehood thinks for the recompense when he will receive. This explains of the tendency of the early Muslims to be in service of faith. History records many instances in which they abandoned their homelands and accepted to sacrifice their souls and money, thus leaving their homeland and children for the sake of their religion. This is because their motive was to undertake a universal humane. This mission can only be done by those who are ready to sacrifice themselves. As for communists, they think first of control of material resources.

Indeed, it is narrated that when one of the companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* realised that the only thing that stood between him and eternal felicity was to fight and be martyred, it became his immediate wish. In fact, he threw down some dates he was holding in his hand ⁽¹⁾ as soon as he heard the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* issue the glad tidings of paradise (for a soldier martyred treading upon Allah's Path)! He did not even spare time to finish eating the dates! He rushed to the battle seeking martyrdom, aspiring to attain Allah's Promise. It was narrated that some of those who strove were heard calling out in the battlefield, 'Blow, O, winds of Paradise!' Another one was heard saying, 'Truly, I can smell the fragrance of Paradise from beyond Mount Uhud.'⁽²⁾

(1) Narrated by *Al-Bukhari* in his *Sahih* (4046) on the authority of *Jabir ibn `Abdullah*, who said, 'A man asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on the Day of Uhud, "Tell me, if I am killed today, where will I end up?" He said *peace and blessings be upon him* "In Paradise." On hearing this, the man threw the dates he was holding in his hand and fought until he was martyred.'

(2) Narrated by *Al-Bukhari* in his *Sahih* (2805) on the authority of *Anas ibn Malik*, who said, 'My uncle *Anas ibn An-Nadr* did not attend the Battle of Badr. He said, "O, Messenger of Allah, I was absent from the first battle you fought against the pagans. If Allah were to let me participate in a battle against the pagans, Allah will see what I will do." When the day of Uhud arrived, and the Muslim ranks were exposed (due to some soldiers failure to hold their positions), he said, "O, Allah, I beg of You to excuse these people (meaning his Companions) for what they have done, and I declare my=

Allah's statement, 'We (Allah) let them enjoy themselves for a little while, but in the end We shall drive them to a harsh torment' (*Luqman*: 24) is referring to the transient enjoyment from the temporal joys of this world. In relation to the disbelievers, these temporal joys only lure them into their own destruction, and by no means, should they be regarded as a sign of Allah's Favour. Earlier, we mentioned that you do not push your enemy down a rug; rather, you elevate him and raise him so that his fall will be harder and more painful. In a similar sense, the True Lord *Glorified is He* grants disbelievers a transient enjoyment, remaining only for a brief time to increase the intensity of their losses and regret when they are divested of these fleeting joys.

The same meaning has been expressed elsewhere in the Quran in Allah's saying: 'So, when they forgot (the warning) with which they had been reminded, We opened to them the gates of every (pleasant) thing, until in the midst of their enjoyment in that which they were given, all of a sudden, We took them to punishment. Lo! They were plunged into destruction with deep regrets and sorrows.' (*al-An'am*: 44) The verbal form *mublisun* which is translated as plunged into destruction with deep regrets and sorrows means they have totally lost hope for any type of good thing.

The Arabic word *fath* which is translated as 'opened to them the gates' does not necessarily connote that something desirable or favourable will happen unless it occurs with a definite article, i.e. *Al-fath* (manifest success or victory). This leads us to our next point that there is a difference between something being thrown open to you (*fath laka*) and something being thrown open upon you (*fath `alayka*). When you use the expression *fath laka*, that is 'thrown open to you', this implies that it is something in your favour. Conversely, when you say *fath `alayka*, that is such-and-such has been 'thrown open upon you', it connotes that something (in this case, enjoyment and the trifles of this world) has been given to you as a burden.

On this basis, do not be deluded when you see the good things of this world lavished upon some people. You should be well aware that they have

= *innocence before You of what these people (meaning the idolaters) have done.*" Afterward, he proceeded toward the enemy but was first met by Sa`ad ibn Mu`adh, to whom he said, "O, Sa`ad ibn Mu`adh, Paradise! I swear by the Lord of An-Nadr, I can smell its scent from behind Uhud."

forgotten Allah's Warnings. Interestingly enough, there is a non-prophetic Hadith which states that when Allah is angry with someone, He issues their provision from unlawful sources, and if His Anger intensifies, He makes the person's unlawful enterprise highly lucrative.

The purpose of this lies in keeping such a person in comfort, luxury and enjoying high status until Allah seizes him suddenly with a mighty, painful grasp. Indeed, seizing a disbeliever at the height of his worldly power and the peak of his tyranny indicates the strength and power of the seizure. There is nothing characteristic about seizing a weak person. This is, in some way, similar to an athlete who sets out to break a world record; he goes and breaks the highest record to establish his worthiness.

In this connection, it is also worth noting that when the Quran challenged its opponents to match its rhetorical brilliance and linguistic marvel, it issued this challenge to Arabs. They were a people known for eloquence, rhetoric, and oratory skills. It goes without saying that it would not be worthwhile to issue this challenge to someone who was unskilled in the art of language or non-fluent speaker.

The meaning of the part of the verse saying, '...but in the end We shall drive them to a harsh torment' (*Luqman*: 24), means that the grip would be tightened around them until they find nothing except harsh punishment. Or this part of the verse can signify that the judgment and time preceding punishment will be more agonising for them than the punishment itself as stated in the Noble Hadith: 'Verily, the sun will draw near the heads (on that day) until people would wish to only go away, even if it were to Hellfire!'⁽¹⁾

Here, their suffering has been described as *ghalizh* (harsh). The Arabic word *ghilzh* refers to thickness. This means that their suffering will take the form of a tremendous punishment, making it impossible to move the soul

(1) Narrated in *Sahih Muslim* on the authority of *Al-Miqdad ibn Al-Aswad*, who said, 'I heard the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him say, "On the Day of Judgment, the sun will draw near the created beings until it is something like a mile away from them. People will be immersed in sweat according to their deeds. It will be up to the ankles of some of them, and up to the knees of some of them, and up to the waists of some of them, and sweat will completely muzzle some of them."' At-Tadhkirah by Imam Al-Qurtubi (p.274).

away from it. On the other hand, if their punishment had been described as thin or slight, it would have given them some hope of being able to flee from it.

Afterward, the Quran continues to address the disbelievers:

وَلَيْنَ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ لَيَقُولُنَّ
 اللَّهُ قُلِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

If you ask them who created the heavens and earth, they are sure to say, ‘God.’ Say, ‘Praise belongs to God,’ but most of them do not understand [25] (The Quran, *Luqman*: 25)

This is a sufficient confutation; they themselves testified that Allah *the Exalted* is the Creator of the heavens and earth. After this acknowledgement on their part, it is amazing to consider how they could turn away from worshipping the Creator *Glorified is He* and instead worship objects that cannot create, see, or hear.

For this reason, after their testimony and their openly acknowledging that Allah is the Creator of the heavens and earth, the True Lord *the Exalted* follows this by saying: ‘Say, "All praises and thanks be to Allah!"’ (*Luqman*: 25) Praising Allah is appropriate in this verse because they are making a confession against themselves. In fact, it is common amongst us to say the same thing in our dealings with one another such as when you are engaged in an argument and the opposing side inadvertently acknowledges the superiority of your position, you usually exclaim, ‘All praise is due to Allah!’

This expression of praise and gratitude is said on many different occasions. When your opponent (in a debate) acknowledges your argument as valid, you say, ‘All praise is due to Allah.’ Likewise, when Allah *the Almighty* rescues you from being harmed by the misconduct of a bad person, you say, ‘All praise is due to Allah.’ What this truly means is the following: ‘All praise is due to Allah for saving me from the evil of this corrupt person.’

Also, on hearing the news of the death of an outlaw or any wicked person, we say, ‘All praise is due to Allah.’ Again, in this example we are praising Allah *the Almighty* for protecting us from the illegal or harmful actions of

such a wicked person. When an iniquitous person dies, it is as if Allah is freeing the land and its people from his evil. This is similar to Allah's saying: 'The evildoers were wiped out. Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds!' (*al-An'am*: 45)

'All praise is due to Allah' is also said when a victimised person receives justice, and his grievance is redressed or his innocence is proven. Allah willing, in the Hereafter, we will be amongst those who have the privilege of saying, 'All praises and thanks be to Allah Who has removed from us (all) grief. Verily, our Lord is indeed Most Forgiving, Most Appreciative.' (*Fatir*: 34)

'And those who kept their duty to their Lord will be led to Paradise in groups, till, when they reach it, and its gates will be opened, and its keepers will say, "Peace be upon you! You have done well, so enter here to abide therein." And they will say, "All praises and thanks be to Allah Who has fulfilled His Promise to us and has made us inherit (this) land. We can dwell in paradise where we will. How excellent a reward for the (pious, good) workers!"' (*az-Zumar*: 73-74)

You also say, 'All praise is due to Allah' when you are delivered from a state of distress, sorrow or grief. Most importantly, 'All praise is due to Allah' will be said when we enter paradise and enjoy its everlasting bliss. We will have fully realised the truthfulness of what Allah *Glorified is He* has informed us of concerning the delights of paradise.

In essence, whether we are praising Allah *the Most High* for relieving us from evil or bestowing good upon us, we are praising Him for His Blessings. Yet, beyond this praise lies an even higher kind of one. Have you not read the Qudsi Hadith saying: 'Verily, Allah will manifest Himself to His believing servants in Paradise and say, "O, My servants, shall I not give you something better than this?" They will say, "O, Lord, what could possibly be better than this when You have given us that which no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard and no human heart has ever imagined?" Allah will say, "I will bestow upon you My Good Pleasure, and I shall never thereafter be angry with you."'⁽¹⁾ After earning Allah's eternal Contentment, what else is thereto which to aspire?

(1) Agreed upon Hadith. It was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (6049) and also by Muslim in his Sahih compilation (2829) on the authority of Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri. Its=

Allah *the Exalted* also says: 'You [O, Prophet] will see the angels surrounding the Throne, glorifying their Lord with praise. True judgment will have been passed between them, and it will be said, "Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds."' (*az-Zumar*: 75) This is the highest and ultimate praise. At first, you were in a state of praise because of the blessings of Allah that you were enjoying. Now, you are in a state of praise because of your proximity to the Giver of those blessings Glorified is He!

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...But most of them know not.' (31: 25). Either this part of the verse is speaking about people who are heedless of Allah *the Almighty* or '...But most of them know not' (*Luqman*: 25) refers to lack of real, beneficial knowledge, even if they possess unscriptural knowledge or knowledge that only fulfils physical desires.

Afterward, the chapter shifts into a different scene. It introduces a verse that deals with Allah's Signs within the creation. Allah *the Exalted* says:

لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ ﴿٢٦﴾

Everything in the heavens and earth belongs to God.

God is self-sufficient and worthy of all praise [26]

(The Quran, *Luqman*: 26)

After Allah *the Exalted* has recorded their acknowledgement and testimony that He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, He *the Most High* wanted to make it clear to us that the heavens and the earth are, in fact, simply receptacles which contain the created beings that dwell within them. To be sure, many things are contained within the heavens and the earth—some of which we know and some of which we do not know. As a principle, that which is held by a

= wording is as follows: 'Verily, Allah will say to the inhabitants of Paradise, "O, inhabitants of Paradise!" They will respond, "Here we are! At Your service, O, Lord, and all the good is in Your Hand." Then He will say, "Are you contented?" They will reply, "And how should we not be contented, O, Lord, when You have given to us that which You have given to no one else of Your creation?" Then, He will say, "Shall I not give you something better than that?" They will say, "O, Lord, what can be better than this?" He will say, "I shall bestow My Good Pleasure upon you, and I shall never thereafter be displeased with you."'

container is always more valuable than the container itself. Take a wallet, for instance; the money inside the wallet is usually worth more than the wallet itself. The same can be said of a safe. The jewels, money, and important documents are usually more precious and important than the safe itself.

This explains why we have always said: Never use the Quran as a safekeeping place for something important to you. The Quran is more precious than anything else. It should not be used to preserve things; quite the reverse is true, it should be preserved.

The noble verse also contains an indication that just as they have acknowledged that Allah *Glorified is He* is responsible for the creation of the heavens and earth, it is also necessary for them to acknowledge that He is the owner of all that is in them. In many ways, it represents the most basic logical deduction (Allah is the Creator of the heavens and earth; Allah is the owner of whatever is in the heavens and the earth); anyone with sound faculties will arrive at this conclusion. As long as the heavens and the earth belong to Allah, He is the owner of whatever is in them. Imagine that you owned a plot of land and one day something valuable happened on your land; in this case, the object you found is considered your property both legally and logically.

This is an issue that every person endowed with reason should reflect upon. Allah is the Owner of all that exists in the heavens and on the earth, including humans—who have been especially honoured by Allah *the Most High*. Indeed, Allah has made the human being the steward of the rest of creation and has elevated mankind above all other created forms. For proof of this, one only needs to observe the way in which the creation has been subjected to the use of human beings: plants, animals, and inanimate objects have been all harnessed to their service. This gives rise to the question: Is it proper for a ward to be greater than his steward is or to have a longer life span?

Again, as we mentioned, rational people must contemplate this issue. They must survey creation and question: How can this inanimate object, which serves me, outlive me?

There must certainly be another plane of existence upon which my years will extend beyond those of the sun, moon, and the other inanimate objects which serve me. This plane of existence is referred to as the Hereafter. Indeed,

in it the sun will be extinguished and the rest of creation will evanesce, but mankind will remain.

Therefore, you are in need of Allah's created beings and creation that exist in the heavens and on the earth. Indeed, only Allah is capable of maintaining these various created beings within His creation; however, He is absolutely Self-Sufficient and in no way dependent on or in need of any of His created beings. This explains why He says: '...Indeed, Allah is the Rich (Self-Sufficient, Free of all wants or needs), worthy of all praise.' (*Luqman*: 26) To be sure, Allah—with His Perfect Attributes—performed the act of creation, yet, it is important to remember that the act of creation did not endow Him with new attributes. In other words, He was the Giver of Life (*Al-Muhyi*) before He had created anything to which He gave life. He was the Exalter (*Al-Mu'iz*) before there was anyone to exalt!

As we have mentioned many times throughout the pages, you do not say that so-and-so is a poet simply because you saw him compose poetry. He was a poet even before he composed his first bit of poetry. Of course, he was; otherwise, he could not have composed poetry.

When Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* says, '...Indeed, Allah is the Rich (Self-Sufficient, Free of all wants or needs) ...' (*Luqman*: 26), He means absolute self-sufficiency. In relation to Allah, everything in the heavens and on the earth is part of His Dominion. It has been related in a Qudsi Hadith that the heavens and the earth within Allah's Kingdom can be likened to a ring that someone has flung in a vast desert.⁽¹⁾ In spite of the fact that we have made many advancements within the field of natural sciences, such as engineering and light years measurement, do not think that Allah's Kingdom is limited to such spaces, created beings and inanimate objects that we are able to perceive.

(1) *It was narrated on the authority of Abu Dhar Al-Ghifari that he asked Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him about the Kursi and he replied, 'By Him in Whose Hand is my soul, the seven heavens and the seven earths in comparison to the Kursi (Allah's Footstool) are nothing but like a ring thrown in a vast desert. Likewise, the superiority of the 'Arsh (Allah's Throne) over the Kursi is like the superiority of the desert over that ring.' Narrated by Ibn Jarir At-Tabari in his major historical compendium, At-Tarikh (vol. 1, p. 150), Ibn Hibban in Mawarid Az-Zam'an (p.52) and Abu Na'im in Al-Hilya (vol. 1, p. 166)*

As we pointed out earlier, Allah *the Most High* is perfectly Self-Sufficient. He originated creation, but He has absolutely no need for it. After He originated creation, He placed it at the disposal of His servants. Thus, it follows naturally that this Creator should be worthy of praise: ‘...Indeed, Allah is the Rich (Self-Sufficient, Free of all wants or needs), worthy of all praise.’ (*Luqman*: 26) The word used in the Arabic text *hamid* (worthy of all praise) appears on the empathic pattern *fa`il* and means *mahmoud* (the praiseworthy, honourable, laudable, meritorious). Allah has also been described as *Hamid* (the One Who gives praise or thanks) such as His saying: ‘...indeed, Allah is Appreciative and Knowing.’ (*al-Baqara*: 158) So, this noble verse mentions Allah as being ‘Appreciative’, but to whom?

Some scholars say that since Allah has taught His servants to respond kindly or with something better whenever they are greeted, in the present situation, you are thanking your Lord. He returns your gratitude on the basis of the aforementioned principle. This means that if you thank Him (for what He has given you), He responds to your gratitude by giving you more. The extra you receive is an expression of His Gratitude and Appreciation for the thanks you have offered. In other words, Allah’s responsiveness to gratitude is His Way of rewarding you for your gratitude.

Next, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَلَوْ أَنَّمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مِن شَجَرَةٍ أَقْلَمٌ وَالْبَحْرُ يَمُدُّهُ مِن بَعْدِهِ
سَبْعَةُ أَبْحُرٍ مَّا نَفِدَتْ كَلِمَاتُ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٢٧﴾

**If all the trees on earth were pens and all the seas,
with seven more seas besides, [were ink,] still God’s
words would not run out: God is almighty and
all wise [27] (The Quran, *Luqman*: 27)**

Turning our attention to Allah’s statement, ‘And if whatever trees on the earth ...’ (*Luqman*: 27), we find that the word *min* (which appears in the Arabic text, and whose function is performed by the word ‘whatever’ in the translation) is used to convey generality. It refers to anything that could remotely be called a tree. There is a difference between saying, ‘I do not have

money' and saying, 'I do not have whatever money.' The first statement does not preclude the possibility of you owning a small insignificant amount of money. Conversely, within the second statement you have effectively negated your possession of even the smallest denomination of currency. This means that you have no money whatsoever, not a small amount, and certainly not a larger one. Another example of this linguistic rule is how you would say, 'There is no one at home.' Perhaps you are aware that there is a child or woman in the house as you make this statement. On the other hand, were you to say, 'There is not a single soul in the house', this would mean that the house is completely empty of anyone that could be referred to as a soul.

The Arabic word *shajarah* (tree) encompasses every type of vegetation that has a trunk. Speaking of trees, one of the things that will be noticed about them is that their branches intertwine and entangle, which is what Allah is referring to when He says: 'By your Lord, they will not be true believers until they let you [O, Muhammad] decide between them in all matters of dispute [*shajara baynahum*]...' (*an-Nisa'*: 65); in the Arabic text, the verbal form *shajara* is the word used to describe their disagreement.

As for the types of vegetation that do not have stalks, they are usually classified as grass, herbs, or shrubs. These can usually be found growing plentifully on the earth's surface, especially after rainfall. The reason these types are excluded from the parable mentioned in the verse is that it would be counterintuitive to think of pens being fashioned out of shrubs. It is much more sensible to use an analogy in which trees with branches and boughs are linked in association with pens.

Indeed, the Quran mentions both types of vegetation in its own inimitable address as in the following verse in which Allah says: 'The sun and the moon [move] by precise calculation. And the stars and trees prostrate.' (*ar-Rahman*: 5-6) Notice that when describing the sun and moon, Allah says: '...[move] by precise calculation.' (*ar-Rahman*: 5); this refers to their precise calculated courses because they are the means through which time is calculated. Hence, their courses must be exact. 'And the stars and trees prostrate.' (*ar-Rahman*: 6); that is to say, they are in a state of submission to Allah *the Exalted*.

The word *An-najm* (star) appearing in this noble verse can be viewed as relating to the sun and moon, in which case it would linguistically signify ‘stars’, and serve as a continuation of Allah’s Speech about heavenly bodies—or relating to trees—in which case it would signify plants without stalks or grass and serve as Allah’s introduction of a new point about vegetation. It is a word that can be read with a certain meaning and understood with entirely different meaning according to the attached personal pronoun within the same construction. Indeed, a poet paid attention to this subtle difference when he said:

When travelling to you, my guides are the stars (*An-najm*)

Likewise, my steed, eyes fixed on the path; it too is guided by *An-najm* (grass)

The poet mentioned that he looks to the stars (*An-najm*) to find his way on the path. He extended this meaning by pointing out that his riding animal also looks to *An-najm* for guidance; however, in the case of the riding animal, he does not mean the stars; rather, he is referring to the grass. Words that possess multiple meanings are common to Arabic language. Take the word ‘*ain*’, for instance; it can be used to refer to gold and silver, to a spy, to water or to the physical organ of sight.

Refocusing our attention on the current verse, we find that Allah says: ‘...with seven seas behind it to add to its supply...’ (*Luqman*: 27). This means that Allah’s Words would not be exhausted even if these additional seas served as back-up supply for the sea—in the hypothetical case that it might run dry. A thought-provoking question that one could ask after pondering this parable is the following: Why has the reserve been mentioned in relation to the ink instead of the pens? Many scholars hold the opinion that it is due to a single ink pen being capable of writing with many different ink cartridges. In fact, the amount of ink cartridges one can insert into a pen is unlimited. Therefore, it is more likely to assume that the ink would expire as opposed to the pen. The depth of the parable becomes apparent if you consider the fact that trees and branches grow and multiply—in this, their ability to be unlimited is similar to that of a pen—while the water in the ocean is a relatively set amount that does not increase, making its comparison with ink particularly apposite.

In terms of understanding this issue, it is also beneficial to read the following noble verse: 'Say, "If the sea were ink for [writing] the words of my Lord, the sea would be exhausted before the words of my Lord were exhausted, even if We brought the like of it as a supplement."' (*al-Kahf*: 109)

When the verse in the chapter of Luqman proclaims, '...with seven seas behind it ...' (*Luqman*: 27), the objective is not to give a specific amount; rather, it is simply to convey abundance. A similar construction has been employed in Allah's following Words: '...sevens heavens ...' (*at-Talaq*: 12). The seven heavens being referenced in this verse pertain to our solar system. Have you given any thought to the heavens in other galaxies? Bear in mind, we have already established that the terms 'sky' and 'heaven' refer to everything above you.

As such, seven, the specific number mentioned in connection with the heavens, is mentioned to convey abundance, not to state an exact amount. In fact, it was customary amongst Arabs to use seven as the highest number one could reach. In essence, numbers are simply numerals which clarify the amount of an object being enumerated. This means there is a difference between a number and the item being counted. Uncovering this difference enables us to respond to the orientalist's and their objection to the Prophet's plural marriages. As we mentioned, numbers are numerals (1, 2, 3, 4, 5), and an object being counted is being described by numerals.

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to prohibit unrestricted polygamy, on account of Allah's Revelation, he ordered whoever was married to more than four women to choose four of them and to divorce the rest.⁽¹⁾

At the time of this revelation, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was already married to nine women. The fact that this ruling did not

(1) Narrated by Imam Malik in the *Muwatta'*, *Book of Talaq* (p. 587) that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said to a man from Thaqif who was married to ten women at the time his tribe converted to Islam, 'Keep four wives and divorce the rest.' At-Tirmidhi narrated it also from Ibn 'Umar as a *mawsul* (connected) Hadith in his *Sunnan* (1128); this version maintained that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* told him to choose four of them. The man's name was related as Ghailan ibn Salamah Al-Thaqafi.

apply to him, namely the Messenger of Allah, for he remained married to all of them, and this fact is well known. This is where orientalist cite a bone of contention, for they ask, 'Why did this ruling not apply to Muhammad as it applied to others?' How could he be allowed to retain nine wives, while everyone else in the Muslim community was restricted to four? Indeed, their objections reveal the inadequacy of their understanding. They do not understand the difference between a number and the item to which it relates. Did Allah *Glorified is He* make his Messenger exempt from the prohibition of the number (which in this case is four wives) or exempt from the prohibition of that which was being numbered (his wives)?

We would respond to them by saying that Allah only gave him an exemption from the prohibition of that which was being counted (the number of the women he was married to at the time of the Divinely revealed ruling). This is due to that in a different verse Allah addresses his Messenger by saying: 'It is not lawful for you (to marry other) women after this, nor to change them for other wives even though their beauty attracts you ...' (*al-Ahzab*: 52). This verse obligated Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to limit himself to the women to whom he was currently married. He was not allowed to marry more women, nor was he allowed to marry after them—even if all of them died.

Accordingly, Allah did not grant him an absolute exemption regarding the number of women he could marry; for sure, being granted this by Him would mean that if one or all of his wives died, it would be lawful for him to simply marry other women.

Concerning this, it is reasonable for you to inquire: Why did Allah make an exception for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* regarding that which was being counted (the women he was married to at the time of the revealed ruling, which limited the number of women a man could be married to at any one time to four) as opposed to the number of women he could marry? Many scholars point out the fact that all other wives, namely the wives of other than Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had the option of remarrying if they were divorced by their husbands. The wives of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on the other hand, were the 'Mothers

of the Believers'. This status amongst the Muslim community entailed that, for a believing man, marrying any of them was illegitimate or illegal. Hence, if one of them was divorced by the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* she must remain single for the rest of her life.

For this reason, the Messenger of Allah was ordered to retain his wives—despite the fact that they were nine in number—with the condition that he could not marry any more women. Conversely, other men were given the right to exercise choice; they could marry as many times as they wanted, provided that the number of women they were married to at any given time did not exceed four. When viewed through this prism, one can see how this ruling actually placed limitations on the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* while allowing more freedom and choice for his community in this regard.

We also know that most of the wives of the Prophet were elderly women, and some of them had no longer physical desire. Rather, these women desired the honour of being associated with the Messenger of Allah and the esteem of being regarded as 'Mothers of the Believers'. As a matter of fact, one of them, when faced with the possibility of jeopardising this rank, preferred to relinquish her right to conjugal relations—granting the day she would normally spend with the Messenger to a co-wife—as opposed to the option of no longer being married to him. The honour of remaining his wife was simply enough for her.⁽¹⁾

Recognising how an exemption from a ruling that sets something at a specific number differs from an exemption that exists in connection with what is being numbered is critical in refuting the aspersions, lies, and baseless accusations cast by orientalist on the person of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* regarding his marriages. As we have shown, their 'claim' that he 'created latitude' for himself while placing restrictions upon the members of his community is demonstrably false.

(1) *This is in reference to what Sawda bint Zam`ah Allah be pleased with her the wife of the Messenger of Allah, did. She granted the day she would normally spend with the Messenger of Allah to `A'isha Allah be pleased with her as an alternative to not being divorced from the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him (as he would not deprive her of her rights). She said to the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him 'Keep me, O Messenger of Allah. I will give my appointed night to `A'isha. I do not desire what women desire.'* Al-Isabah by Ibn Hajr (vol. 8, p. 117).

This issue of differentiating between a number and a thing numbered is quite vast; even some students of Arabic grammar find it confusing. For instance, there is nothing problematic about saying number one and number two. Both these numbers have masculine singular and feminine singular forms. So, we say one in its masculine singular form as *wahid*, and in its feminine singular form as *wahida*. The same applies with the number two. In its masculine singular form, we say *ithnan*, while its feminine singular usage is *ithnatan*. When using these two numbers, the gender of the number should conform to the gender of the object being counted. However, starting from three, the number should differ—in terms of its gender—from the object being counted. This means that if one (number three and above) is using a number to refer to a feminine object, the masculine form of the number should be used. The inverse is also true. If one is counting or enumerating an object that is masculine, the feminine form of the number should be used. Nonetheless, we must ask 'From where did this difference in counting objects come?'

Scholars have noted that the one pondering this issue should be aware that the foundation, or original state, of words is masculinity. This explains why the feminine item within the language is in need of a suffix or some other type of sign which indicates that it is feminine. Conversely, the masculine form of a word does not need any additional signs to indicate that it is masculine, so one simply says, *qalam* (pen). In contrast, when using the Arabic word for inkwell, *dawat*, one must use an additional *ta'* at the end of the word in order to indicate that it is feminine.

Now, let us focus our attention on the numbers from three to ten. You say, for example, *thalathat* (three), *arba`at* (four), *khamsat* (five), *sittat* (six), etc. Pronouncing these numbers in Arabic, you recognise that each number ends in *ta'*. However, this (*ta'*) does not indicate that the word is feminine. It should be carefully noted that the numbers in our example do not have corresponding objects, for when numbers are mentioned by themselves (without objects) they, by default, include *ta'*. Now, in the event that we want to make these numbers (three to ten) feminine—in order to serve as modifiers for their corresponding objects—we omit the original *ta'*. We do not add another *ta'*. The omission indicates that the number has become feminised. Although the most common way to feminise a word in Arabic is attaching an additional *ta'* to the end of

the word; conversely, if the number is being used to modify a masculine object, it remains in its original form, i.e. ending with the letter *ta*'.

Having established that, our next question returns us directly to the context of the verse under study: What is the significance of the number seven in particular, which is used in this verse as well as elsewhere throughout the Quran? Some scholars mention that the foundation and template for all numbers is the number one. When counting, it is customary to increase by units of one. This means that one is like the raw material from which other numbers are made. When we add one to one, we get two. If we add one more, we wind up with three and so on.

In Arabic, it is generally well known that three is the smallest collective number (to which we may assign a noun in its plural form). Similarly, it is known that all numbers fall into one of two categories: even or odd. Even numbers are those which can be evenly divided by two, whereas odd numbers, on the other hand, are those which cannot be evenly divided by two. Allah *the Exalted* says: 'By the even and the odd.' (*al-Fajr*: 3) Allah begins with the even and then mentions the odd. This means that He started with the even number two and then progressed to three. Three is usually considered the first odd number. As for, one—which cannot be evenly divided by two—it is not considered the first odd number because of its status as the foundation upon which all proceeding numbers are built.

Indeed, when Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'By the even and the odd' (*al-Fajr*: 3), the fact that He began with two and then progressed to three is significant. Two is the first even number, and three is the first odd number; four is the second even number, and five is the second odd number; six is third even number, and seven is the third odd number.

We have already mentioned that in Arabic language the smallest unit of items which can be considered plural is three. Accordingly, the early Arabs considered number seven as the greatest collective number in general, with respect to odd or even. As a result, seven was normally where they would stop counting. If they wanted to count past seven, before mentioning the eighth item, they would place the conjunction 'and,' which they called *waw al-thamaniyah* (*waw* of eight or the *waw* that usually precedes any mention of

or reference to the number eight). Hence, the Glorious Quran conformed itself to the speech patterns and rules of numbers used by the people amongst whom it was first promulgated.

You can read, if you wish, the following glorious verse: ‘And those who disbelieved will be driven to Hell in groups, till, when they reach it, the gates thereof will be opened ...’ (*az-Zumar*: 71).

When speaking of paradise, Allah says: ‘And those who kept their duty to their Lord will be led to paradise in groups, till, when they reach it, and its gates will be opened ...’ (*az-Zumar*: 73).

What is the difference between the two noble verses? Why does only the second one include the conjunction *waw*?

Some scholars have responded to these questions by pointing out that in the former the phrase, ‘...the gates thereof will be opened ...’ (*az-Zumar*: 71) represents an action which takes effect only after the fulfilment of a condition (*jawab ash-shart*). The disbelievers have been in denial concerning the fulfilment of the condition which begins thus: ‘...till, when they reach it...’ (*az-Zumar*: 71). Something will happen as a result of their reaching hell, but what? The answer is the following: ‘...the gates thereof will be opened...’ (*az-Zumar*: 71). An important question to ask at this point is: Have the believers, whose piety and God-consciousness will lead them to paradise, denied the occurrence of the Day of Judgment?

The answer is 'Definitely not'. Therefore, ‘...and its gates will be opened...’ (*az-Zumar*: 71) is not considered the consequent of a conditional statement (*jawab ash-shart*) in relation to believers. That is to say, believers have never regarded the Day of Judgment as merely probable. They have known for certain that the gates of paradise shall open for them. In relation to them, the condition that will be fulfilled and the action that will take effect after its fulfilment is embodied in the following: ‘And its keepers will say, "Peace be upon you! You have done well, so enter here to abide therein." And they will say, "All praises and thanks be to Allah Who has fulfilled His Promise to us and has made us inherit (this) land. We can dwell in Paradise where we will. How excellent a reward for the (pious, good) workers!"’ (*az-Zumar*: 73-74)

Since the doors of Hell are only seven in number, there is no need to mention *waw at-thamaniyah* or the *waw* of eight when speaking of them. When the address relates to paradise, on the other hand, Allah mentions *waw at-thamaniyah* because it has eight gates.

In the same manner, read Allah's following statement and notice the way that it employs the use of the *waw* of eight: 'Perhaps his Lord, if he divorced you [all], would substitute for him wives better than you - submitting [to Allah], believing, devoutly obedient, repentant, worshipping, and given to fasting, [ones] previously married and virgins.' (*at-Tahrim*: 5)

You find that the *waw* of eight appears before the eighth characteristic (of the women who Allah could grant the Prophet in marriage). Indeed, the Arabs would normally stop at seven when enumerating items in a series because of its status as the count limit, whether for odd or even—as we explained earlier.

Allah's statement, '...with seven seas behind it to add to its supply ...' (*Luqman*: 27) is describing a hypothetical scenario in which the water of the sea would be turned into ink and used to write Allah's Words. However, even in this case: '...yet the Words of Allah would not be exhausted ...' (*Luqman*: 27). Allah's Words are the cause of bringing into being all the amazing creatures and creation that have been predestined to come to the world. Allah *the Exalted* states that 'When He wills a thing to be, He but says to it, "Be"—and it is.' (*Ya Sin*: 82) Everything Allah has ever wanted to come into existence materialised by the simple command, 'Be.'

There is something particularly wondrous here that we should ponder: Allah *the Most High* says 'Be' to something which has not been created yet, and it comes into being. This reveals a profound point: all things that will come into existence have been recorded and are present with Allah *the Almighty* in the eternal realm. They are simply awaiting Allah's Decree 'Be' so that they can materialise within our realm. Indeed, this is the source of the aphorism—which is popular in the circles of those who possess knowledge of Allah—which reads as follows: 'Allah is no longer originating affairs; He is simply manifesting them.'

Therefore, '...yet the Words of Allah would not be exhausted ...' (*Luqman*: 27) denotes Allah's Word 'Be' and all else which expresses Allah's

Decree in every matter of the universe. This includes the decrees which we know or will know in the future, and even those which will remain unknown to us until the Day of Judgment.

In relation to the creation of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* which is a wondrous sign of Divine Power, did Allah not say: ‘...and His Word, ("Be!" - and he was) which He bestowed on Maryam (Mary) and a spirit created by Him...’ (*an-Nisa*: 171)? This means that `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was not created in the normal way, as other human beings, that is, from a mother and a father. He was created by the direct Divine command ‘Be.’ Nevertheless, the question is why; why was `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* created in this unique way?

Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to establish as an indisputable fact His unrestricted ability to originate creation. This means that He wants to demonstrate that He creates however He wants. He originated a human being without a male or female progenitor as in the case of Adam *peace be upon him*. He created `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* through a female parent but without a male. He has also created a human being through the presence of a male progenitor but without a female, as in the case of Hawwa (Eve) *peace be upon her*. Surely, all possible creative scenarios that can be thought of are present and each of them bespeaks Allah’s Creative Power.

As long as we recognise Allah’s Creative Power as being unlimited, the means that He uses to effectuate the process of creation are unimportant. For example, if you wanted to form a drop of water, you would need to combine the elements oxygen and hydrogen under specific conditions in order to actualise your goal; otherwise, forming water would be impossible. Conversely, the Creator *Glorified is He* can create out of nothing or out of something pre-existing. In relation to Allah, none of these elements of creation possess the ability to independently effectuate an end; quite the reverse is true, they only do what Allah wills.

Next, Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘...Verily, Allah is Almighty, All-Wise.’ (*Luqman*: 27) The Divine Attribute of *Al-‘Aziz* (the Almighty, the Most Honorable) is a description of Allah which indicates that He is invincible and indomitable. There is no one who can discuss or try to rectify an act of Allah.

The fact that Allah's Actions may be disagreeable to the finite minds of some members of creation means nothing. Consider the meanings of might and honour and how they have been stated in Allah's Words addressed to 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*: 'and (remember) when Allah will say (on the Day of Resurrection), "O, 'Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary)! Did you say unto people, 'Worship me and my mother as two gods besides Allah?' He will say, "Glory be to You! It was not for me to say what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, You would surely have known it. You know what is in my inner self though I do not know what is in Yours. Truly, You, and only You, are the All-Knower of all that is hidden and unseen. Never did I say to them aught except what You (Allah) did command me to say, 'Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord.' And I was a witness over them while I dwelt amongst them, but when You took me up, You were the Watcher over them, and You are a Witness to all things.'" (*al-Ma'ida*: 116) At the end of the dialogue 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* proclaims: 'If You punish them, they are Your slaves, and if You forgive them, verily, You, and only You, are the Almighty, the All-Wise.' (*al-Ma'ida*: 118)

From the standpoint of human logic, most people would conclude a mention of Allah's Ability to forgive them with a statement that would call to mind His Perennial Position as the Dispenser of Mercy and the Oft-Forgiving. However, 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* does not mention forgiveness and mercy. Instead, he opts to beseech Allah on the basis of His Might, Majesty, and unlimited Sovereign Power. Through this, 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* is affirming that no one can censure Allah's Actions, no matter what they are.

'...verily You, and only You, are the Almighty, the All-Wise.' (*al-Ma'ida*: 118) This statement of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* makes a point very relevant to his mentioning that Allah *the Exalted* could forgive them. If Allah did forgive them, and people questioned, 'O Lord, how could You forgive them after they made this or that erroneous statement?' Allah would answer, 'Verily, I am the Almighty; the Conqueror Who is never overcome. There is none who can censure My Judgment.' Thus, Allah also concluded verse 27 of the chapter of Luqman with the mention of might, for His Sovereign Might over His creation.

Next, the True Lord *the Exalted* says:

مَا خَلَقَكُمْ وَلَا يَعْثُبُكُمْ إِلَّا كَنَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٢٨﴾

**Creating and resurrecting all of you is only like
creating or resurrecting a single soul: God is all
hearing and All-Seeing [28] (The Quran, *Luqman*: 28)**

One of the most consistent themes throughout the Quran is the True Lord's emphasis on the resurrection and judgment of human beings. The emphasis placed upon this issue is an expression of Allah wants to establish the scales of reward and punishment within the lives of humans. Every action which lacks the scales of reward and punishment is considered invalid. Only some infallible or non-free willed beings have no need for requital. What this means is that an infallible being who is divinely protected from error is perpetually engaged in the performance of good deeds and so need not be concerned about whether his actions warrant reward or punishment. As for non-free willed beings, they do not possess the volition to act or not to act in a certain manner.

If, with the exclusion of these two categories of beings, the principle of accountability for one's actions, good or bad, is not sufficiently established all during life, corruption will inevitably ensue. If the one who chooses to perform righteous deeds is not rewarded and the one who chooses not to avoid bad good deeds is not punished, life will lose its essential balance. In fact, even the communities that do not profess belief in Allah, or God, have established the law that good should be rewarded and evil punished amongst the principles that govern their communal lives.

In the story of Dhu Al-Qarnayn, the True Lord *the Exalted* provides us with an example of how this principle works when He says: 'Indeed, We established him upon the earth, and We gave him to everything a way. So he followed a way.' (*al-Kahf*: 84-85)

In this previous verse, the True Lord *the Exalted* aims to clarify that a human being who has been given power and ability on the earth bears a certain responsibility. His responsibility is to show gratitude to Allah *the Almighty* for putting him in such a privileged position. The truest expression of his gratitude

for being given power on earth is to balance the scales of justice in the universe. 'Until, when he reached the setting place of the sun...' (*al-Kahf*: 86), that is to say, how the sun looked to Dhu Al-Qarnayn. Actually, the sun never really sets. It may appear to set on one group of people in a certain location, but it is rising amongst another group in a different one. 'Until, when he reached the setting place of the sun, he found it [as if] setting in a spring of black muddy (or hot) water, and he found near it a people. We (Allah) said (by inspiration), "O, Dhu Al-Qarnayn! Either you punish them, or treat them with kindness."' (*al-Kahf*: 86)

Such an authorisation to punish people or treat them with kindness can only be given to a person of high moral standards and balance in making decisions. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* says concerning Dhu Al-Qarnayn: '...and We gave him to everything a way...' (*al-Kahf*: 84); this involves a two-fold process: Allah bestowed blessings upon him and also gave him the balance to distribute those blessings effectively. Allah's Gifts to him were not limited to wielding leadership and authority, for he was also given an ample supply of life's core elements and a tremendous sense of fairness that enabled him to optimise his use and diffusion of Allah's Blessings.

This story also displays the code of conduct expected of someone given free choice (in a position of power). The individual who has been given a post to establish justice is responsible for clarifying his organising principles and clearly stating that his position will not be manipulated by desires. This explains his next statement: 'As for him who does wrong, we shall punish him, and then he will be brought back unto his Lord Who will punish him with a terrible torment (Hell)' (*al-Kahf*: 87), this is an expression of the manner in which he would punish. However, he balanced that proclamation with the following: 'But as for him who believes and works righteousness, he shall have the best reward, (Paradise), and we (Dhu Al-Qarnayn) shall speak unto him mild words (as instructions).' (*al-Kahf*: 88) That is to say that after he has received his reward, we still provide him with motivation. We celebrate his pursuit of righteousness to induce others to emulate him.

This demonstrates the necessity of the principle of rewarding good and punishing evil at every level of human endeavour. If we adhere to this principle

when sifting through our day-to-day worldly transactions, what is to be said for the inevitability of applying its criteria to our religious matters and the values that shape our lives? Again, we firmly assert that there must be a time for reward and punishment. When we fail to apply this principle, injustice and assassination would gain momentum amongst people. Once this becomes the status quo, it will have an adverse effect on their lives and eventually deprive them of life's blessings. In a situation that would be ironic as well as lamentable, the person who caused the corruption would be empowered while those dedicated to the religion of Allah—its values and principles—would be disconsolate.

This explains why we find the True Lord *Glorified is He* consistently emphasising the issues of resurrection, judgment, and accountability. You will also notice the enemies of the faith attempting to make people doubt these issues. They employ various means to rattle the faith of people in these principles.

Philosophers have played a role in the attack on the fundamentals of Islamic belief, as well as atheists who have played a role, along with the people of the Book also having a hand in this. Recognising this issue helps us to understand why the entire Torah—as it currently exists—is nearly free of a single reference to the Last Day. Needless to say, this is strange. In fact, it is unimaginable that a heavenly religion which purports to offer guidance for the (God-conscious) living would have its key teachings represented in a text which does not provide ample reminders about the Day of Judgment.

The only plausible conclusion that can be drawn from such acts of suppression of texts is that the Jewish community desired to undermine the faith of people in these fundamentals of belief. Indeed, in as much as these principles rectify and inspire people, widespread acceptance of these principles could threaten the Jewish community's monopoly over temporal authority. Their penchant for authority had even driven them to crave to elevate their position of dominion above human reality—closer to that of Allah's. The Quran relates the following statement of theirs: 'Remember when you said, "O, Musa (Moses), we will not believe you until we see Allah face to face."' (*al-Baqara*: 55)

When Allah *the Most High* made manna, a sweet substance which resembles cream, descend upon them plentifully, and when He gave them birds which resemble quails ready to eat, they failed to show gratitude. They rejected

Allah's bestowal and declined the food that He had prepared for them. They said, 'No (we do not want to eat of what Allah has provided), we want to eat food that we have prepared with our own hands.' The Quran quotes them as saying, 'O, Musa (Moses), we cannot bear to eat only one kind of food' (*al-Baqara*: 61), and so it was said to them, '...Go you down to any town and you shall find what you want! ...' (*al-Baqara*: 61).

As long as the most important things in life—as far as this community appears to show any care—are material concerns, the tendency to give scant measure to the Hereafter, the Day of Judgment and human accountability will be a consistent pattern in their behaviour. This explains why they have attempted to raise doubts about these truths. Philosophers, on the other hand, say, 'When Allah resurrects the human being, this event will inevitably occur after the members of his body have become dust, and a tree or some other form of vegetation has grown upon this dirt. If the aforementioned tree bears fruits and people eat from them, they will be eating from fruits that contain something of the dirt from which they have been nourished. In as much as the dirt contains elements of the body of the human being who has been buried in it, the consumption of the fruit means that some particles of a former human being are transferred to another human!' If any resurrection would occur, would the consumed parts be resurrected with the former person who was initially buried or the latter person who ate the fruit that was nourished by the decomposed remains? Philosophers maintain that if these parts were resurrected with the body of the individual who was initially buried, it would result in a deficiency in the physical constitution of his counterpart, and vice versa.

Philosophers have wandered blindly around this question. They have yet to thoroughly comprehend the unseen aspects of living beings that give essence to their existence. Earlier, we cited an analogy in order to clarify our assertion, we questioned them: If a human being weighed 100 kg, but contracted an illness that reduced his weight to 60 kg, what would this reduction in weight mean to who the person is?

This issue is essentially governed by two factors: nourishment and elimination. During the period in which one is growing, the body's intake exceeds what it eliminates. Conversely, during the period of old age the

body's intake (of nourishment) is less than what it eliminates. When intake and elimination are equal, one experiences a stasis within his weight; his weight will be steady.

So, for instance, the person who lost 40 kg (due to illness) but then was cured by Allah so that he regained his health and his weight returned to normal, was his essence changed throughout the periods of his fluctuating weight? Was it changed when his weight reduced? Was it changed when he returned to his natural weight? Or, was his essence, namely that most essential element of who he is, the same throughout?

Based on what has been discussed, clearly the issue of bodily constitution is not merely about the atoms and molecules that make up the physical body. This is absolutely not true. It is about each individual's unique moral personhood, even with the composition of the human body by the same sixteen elements, starting with oxygen and ending with magnesium. These are the same elements that make up the dirt which covers the ground which gives us the produce that we eat. In truth, each person contains these elements in varying amounts.

In this regard, the True Lord *the Exalted* says: 'We know that which the earth takes of them (their dead bodies), and with Us is a Book preserved.' (*Qaf*: 4) This verse asserts that Allah possesses precise knowledge of how much the body of each deceased person has decomposed into its constituent elements. This means that He knows the exact amount of oxygen, zinc, or phosphorus, etc. that has been separated away from the body of each deceased person since his death (and returned into the earth).

Thus, the resurrection of a human being is accomplished by Allah *the Exalted* raising that individual from the dead. Again, this is not an issue of molecules and atoms; rather, Allah raises the essence of the person, namely his personhood, and in the process, reassembles the person in precise amounts according to His Knowledge of what the person's physical make-up contained. When Allah finishes this process, the human being emerges anew, but unmistakably the same person who has lived before.

Another spot of controversy which they stir up and one of the ambiguities which they make concerning the resurrection is their saying that Allah creates a human being over a six to nine month period. During this time the embryo

experiences a number of phases: from being a drop of semen, to a clinging clot, to a lump of flesh and then out of that little lump of flesh bones develop and then the bones are covered with flesh, etc. They maintain that if this is the amount of time that it takes to create one human being, then how long will it take to re-create humanity in its entirety, from the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* until the Day of Judgment?

We would respond to this group by mentioning the following: Your analysis takes the creation of the human offspring into consideration, namely the process of creation—with which we are all familiar—that can take from six to nine months. However, it neglects the original direct creation of the human being, which is the creation of Adam *peace be upon him*. If you recall correctly, Allah created him a fully formed, adult man. Adam *peace be upon him* never experienced childhood, followed by a period of maturity and fullness of power. Rather, from the beginning his body was fashioned into a perfectly mature and fully developed human form, and then the soul was breathed into him.

Another point on this issue is that any action is comprised of key elements: the action itself, the actor, and the object of the action. To these elements, one can add the amount of time that it takes to complete the action. So, for instance, if I want to move some cargo from one place to another, the action is represented in my transporting the cargo. I am the person responsible for performing the action, and the cargo is the thing upon which being acted. Of course, we cannot forget to include the amount of time it takes to complete the process. When one looks at it closely, he notices that the duration it takes to complete the process is really an expression of how the parts of each event—in this case, transporting the cargo—extend over the parts of time. Thus, fashioning a garment by hand requires significant amounts of time, whereas employing the use of a sewing machine greatly reduces the amount of time one must spend to complete this task.

Therefore, the amount of time that an action requires is directly related to the strength of the individual or thing performing the action. Remember, in the past, streets were lit with oil lamps. This meant that every location needed a designated worker whose job it was to light each lamp. Contrast that with our current state of technological advancement: We can light an entire city

simply by pushing a button! What we are trying to establish is that each time the power of the actor of a particular action increases, the amount of time required to perform that action decreases.

Coming full circle, in a sense, let us now return our focus to the issues of the resurrection and the reconfiguration of the human being after death. Has anyone proposed that this process will occur according to your power—which would mean that you should estimate the amount of time that it will require on the basis of your strength and ability? Of course not, this process will occur according to the power of Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah does not perform actions in the same manner as we, nor does His effectuation of events require concerted effort. Allah *the Exalted* performs actions by the simple proclamation of ‘Be.’ The upshot of all of this is that an action attributed to Allah does not require any time at all; this means that the process we described earlier, particularly how each part of an action consumes small amounts of time, is completely irrelevant to Him.

There is no reason for us to consider this far-fetched in respect to Allah *the Almighty*; He has given you a glimpse of this reality despite your comparatively limited ability. Are you not able to sit in a gathering like this and observe all of us at one time, in a single glance? Or, for that matter, are you not able to hear all of our voices at once? Are you not able to rise and move about simply by your desire to do so? When you perform any of these actions, are the organs and muscles of your body not acting at what could be termed as a slight impulse that crosses your mind? Honestly, do you think about the muscles you are using to perform an action, or even more so about the physiological changes and dynamics that must take place to enable you to come to your feet from a sitting position?

Previously, we clarified this issue by calling attention to the movements of a human being. Consider the movements of a human being (with all fluidity and voluntariness associated with them); the way the limbs move freely at the request of their possessor. Now compare those with the movements of a drilling rig: it cannot move unless you press a specific button.

If you—and you must be mindful that you are a mere servant of Allah—exercise control over your limbs and external organs to such an extent that they function according to your will, is it reasonable for you to regard the

prospect of Allah *the Exalted* exercising control over them by the use of the word 'Be' as far-fetched? How can you regard this as far-fetched while your limbs and external organs do as you wish without you saying anything to them! The idea that you would like your limbs to perform a certain action only needs to cross your mind for them to perform the desired function.

Considering all of this, you might be compelled to ask, 'How is it that my limbs perform the functions I desire them to perform without my saying anything to them, whereas Allah *Glorified is He*. (Who presumably wields more control over my limbs than I) must say the word 'Be' in order to exert His control over them?' We would respond by saying, 'True, it is not necessary for you to say the word 'Be' (to make your limbs do as you want). However, your will is only the secondary cause in making your limbs act according to your command. The primary reason is that they were first subjected to Allah's proclamation 'Be'; indeed, Allah *the Most High* commanded the limbs to be obedient to the wishes of their owner. Therefore, you must conclude that you are not the primary source of your ability to exert your will upon your limbs. On the contrary, it is only by Allah's initial proclamation of 'Be' that you have come to exercise this authority: When Allah *Glorified is He* issued the first proclamation of 'Be', its effectiveness extended to everything in creation.'

Additionally, this understanding helps us to understand the occasion of the Night Journey and the Ascension. A thorough understanding of these events enables us to respond to those who deny them. To be sure, Allah says: 'Exalted is He Who took His Servant by night from Al-Masjid Al-Haram to Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa.' (*al-Isra*: 1)

As soon as the disbelievers learnt of this event, they outright rejected it as falsehood, they quipped, 'How can this be true?' Even riding upon our sturdiest camels, that journey takes us no shorter than a month's time. The fact that it takes you no less than a month to complete the journey in question travelling upon your sturdiest camels is a given. Indeed, your travel requires time, persistence, drive, etc. As we mentioned earlier, the total amount of time required for a trip will boil down to how much time each part of the trip consumes. The case of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on the other hand, represents something altogether different: He did not say, 'I travelled by night', for if he

had said this, it would place the same human limitations on his travel as is placed on yours. On the contrary, he said, 'I was transported by night.'⁽¹⁾

The statement is delivered in the passive voice which means that the action is being attributed to someone other than the speaker. In this case, it means the action should not be attributed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; rather, his transportation should be attributed to Allah *Glorified is He*. 'As the power or capability of one performing an action increases, the amount of time required to perform the action decreases' is the principle we laid out earlier. Proceeding upon this principle, if an action is attributed to the power of the Allah *the Almighty* it does not require any time at all. This explains Allah's Statement about creation and its subsequent repetition (for the reckoning of humanity): '[For Him], the creation of you all and the resurrection of you all are but like [the creation and resurrection of] a single soul ...' (*Luqman*: 28). This matter is facile for Allah *the Most High*. Why is that so? Indeed, the creation of one soul, like the creation of all souls, is completed by the simple utterance of the word 'Be.' This proclamation, simply and plainly, is not a process which requires six to nine months!

Another way of thinking about this issue can be found in the examples about manufacturing we cited earlier. Take yogurt, for example. You begin with some milk and then ferment it by the use of bacteria. Afterward, you allow it to sit at a specific temperature for a while, and it will become yogurt as you intended. Did you sit in front of every container of milk and manually change its contents to yogurt? Or did you simply perform a well-known process whose success meant that you could leave the bacteria and the enzymes within the milk to naturally transform.

The process we just described above is identical to the manner in which Allah *Glorified is He* creates the foetus which is in the womb of its mother. Of course, this comparison takes for granted that the foetus experiences growth and development (in the womb). Nonetheless, on its basis, the creation of a human being should not be considered time-consuming for Allah *the Almighty*.

(1) *The authenticity of this Hadith is agreed upon. It was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4710) and Muslim in his Sahih (170) from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Jabir ibn `Abdullah.*

Indeed, 'Ali Allah *be pleased with him* gave the most comprehensive explanation of this matter when he was questioned, 'How does Allah weigh the deeds of all of humanity—from Adam *peace be upon him* to the Day of Judgment—at one time?' He responded, 'He weighs their deeds all at once in the same manner that He has granted them their provisions all at once.'⁽¹⁾ His comment is asserting that the Power of Allah *the Exalted* is not such that performing an action distracts Him from performing a different action.

Finally, Allah *Glorified is He* concludes this verse with His statement: '...for, verily, Allah is the All-Hearing, All-Seeing. (*Luqman*: 28). Within the Arabic original, both of these expressions *sami`a* and *basir* (All-Hearing and All-Seeing) represent forms intended to convey superlative expression, namely the attributes of hearing and sight in superlative measure. We have already established that you, servants of Allah with comparatively limited ability, are able to glance at this entire group of people and see them all at once. You can also hear many disparate sounds in the same manner.

Considering the remarkableness of your own sight and hearing, what do you conclude must be the range of Allah's Sight and Hearing?

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يُؤَلِّجُ اللَّيْلَ فِي النَّهَارِ وَيُؤَلِّجُ النَّهَارَ فِي اللَّيْلِ وَسَخَّرَ الشَّمْسَ
وَالْقَمَرَ كُلٌّ يَجْرِي إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ﴿٢٩﴾

[Prophet], do you not see that God causes the night to merge into day and the day to merge into night; that He has subjected the sun and the moon, each to run its course for a stated term; that He is aware of everything you [people] do? [29] (The Quran, *Luqman*: 29)

This verse contains cosmic signs which relate to creation; these are signs which are clear to everyone: the believer and the disbeliever, the obedient

(1) Ali ibn Abu Taleb Allah *be pleased with him* was questioned, 'How will Allah weigh the deeds of humanity when their numbers will be so numerous?' 'In the same manner that He provides for them in spite of their large numbers,' he responded. [Sharh nahj Al-Balagha, Sharif Ar-Rida, Dar Ash-Sha`ab (pg. 404, # 298)]

and the disobedient, etc. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* distributes time in periods of night and day; nevertheless, this 'distribution' is not always equal. That is to say that there is nothing mechanical about this phenomenon. We certainly do not see 24 hour periods of day followed by 24 hour periods of night alternating on a 'fixed schedule'. Hence, the day is sometimes shorter. At times, moments near the end of a day are considered as belonging to the subsequent night and vice versa.

Indeed, during the time of Ptolemy, a year was considered to be 365 days, 5 hours, 55 minutes and 2 seconds. After this period, a year came to be regarded as 365.25 days, determined on an algebraic basis. Every four years this fourth of a day catches up with us, and we refer to it as a leap year. This is a year that is longer than the customary 365.25 day year. The years that can be evenly divided by four are referred to as leap years. As a matter of fact, this is why February sometimes contains 29 days (as opposed to the regular 28). This happens during a leap year, due to the accounting for the fourth of a day, we lose when we count the year as 365 days (without including the additional 6 hours).

The word *yawm* (roughly translated as 'day') actually encompasses the day and night; however, they are not divided equally. Allah *the Almighty* according to His wise plan, desired to give every inhabited region on earth intermittent periods of warmer and cooler weather. Allah *Glorified is He* gives each region of the world that which it needs to maintain its particular vegetative system. He *the Most High* gives us the things which are necessary to maintain our lives. Indeed, the system that He has created for the maintenance of His creatures is precise; as a matter of fact, there are some types of plants which only grow during summer months, while there are other types which only grow during winter. This phenomenon is not limited to the summer and winter; on the contrary, the same can be said of spring and autumn equinoxes.

Part of what these phenomena reveal to us is the fact that the Creator made Earth's axis tilt at an angle of 23.5° from its centre position. In other words, Earth does not rest at an angle that makes it equally distributed on all sides. During the winter, Earth's larger portion is tilted away from the sun while the smaller portion is tilted towards it. As a result, you find the days of winter to be longer and cooler than the days of summer. Night reaches its longest stretch, 12 hours, during the fourth month of the Coptic year (*Kiahk*).

Local farmers have even come to say, 'In *Kiahk*, your morning is your evening. As you rise from sleep, you might as well get ready for dinner!'

The opposite is observable during summer. It is as if Earth being tilted on its axis is one of the secrets of the (Divine) engineering that went into the layout of creation. Accordingly, on the 21st of (*Haziran*) June, the summer solstice occurs, and we begin to progress towards winter. On the 23rd of (*Kanun*) December, the winter solstice occurs, and we begin to progress towards spring and summer. Afterward, the spring equinox occurs on the 21st of (*Adhar*) March. In addition to these dates, we can add the autumn equinox, which occurs on the 22nd of (*Aylul*) September. During the equinoxes, you will notice that day and night are the same amount of time. Additionally, the weather of these dates is generally mild and temperate, neither extremely cold nor hot.

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do you not see that Allah causes the night to enter the day and causes the day to enter the night ...' (*Luqman*: 29); the implicit message of this verse is the following: Do not consider day and night fixed quantities of equal amounts. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He*—in accordance with His wise plan for creation—has decreed that a part of the day will eventually over time become a part of the night, and vice versa. For a wise purpose, that benefits both men and women and was decided upon by the Creator, as the length of one of them (either the night or the day) increases, the other decreases. Perhaps one of the wisdoms being intended here is to grant men and women an extension of the essentials upon which their lives rest. Another is possibly for one to learn that the changes which occur within the length of the days and nights are the result of an intricately planned system of Divine Wisdom.

When we separate the day between the hours of daylight and those of darkness, which, as we mentioned, is not a balanced or equally distributed separation, we recognise that night has a specific purpose and that day also has a specific purpose. To be certain, this is what the statement of Allah indicates: 'and made the night [its] cloak, and made the day [a symbol of] life.' (*an-Naba'*: 10-11)

Within the previous verse, night is referred to as a cloak because you achieve a measure of tranquillity at night, and during its time you are

covered and concealed. To mention as a brief side note, it is interesting to point out that we now know that sleeping with lights on is unhealthy; the first basis upon which we can form this conclusion is the statement of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'When you are prepared to take rest, blow out your lamps.'⁽¹⁾

Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies this issue within His statement: 'Consider the bright morning hours and the night when it grows still and dark (*ad-Duha*: 1-2). He also says: 'Consider the night as it veils [the earth] in darkness, and the day as it rises bright!' (*al-Layl*: 1-2) Within these verses, He makes it clear that both night and day have specific purposes which aid in the continuation of life. The primary purpose of the daylight hours is activity and movement, while the primary purpose of the night is rest and stillness. You must be careful not to unnecessarily jumble the purposes of these individual parts of the day. This is a general principle; however, we must make exceptions for individuals for whom the nature of their occupations entails that they work at night and rest during the day.

The Creator *Glorified is He* has endowed the movement of night and day with secrets and wonders which warrant our attention. Speaking of the secrets and wonders of the Creator, it is interesting to note that He *the Most High* has originated every secret within His creation, which means that each secret in creation is 'born' at a specific time. Also, it is worthy to note the fact that He has elected to gradually distribute the knowledge of these secrets amongst His creation over the course of time, as opposed to issuing the knowledge of these matters in one generation. Indeed, if He would have desired the latter and the Quran exposed all the secrets of creation to the community of unlearned people who lived to witness its revelation, it would have amounted to neglect of the generations—all of whom would also engage in the process of calling people to Allah. To be certain that this would have been the case, they (successive generations) would have declared these secrets, some of which even present-day minds—in spite of the great progress they have achieved in

(1) Narrated by *Al-Bukhari* in his *Sahih* (5624) and *Ahmad* in his *Musnad* (3/388) from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of *Jabir ibn `Abdullah*; the wording here is taken from the collection of *Al-Bukhari*.

the fields of science and knowledge—have a difficult time accepting to be falsehoods. For example, look at what scholars said about the roundness of the planet Earth and its revolving around the sun; generally, we were unable to accept these realities until satellite images confirmed them.

Previously, we pointed out that the 'birth' of a secret concerning the creation of Allah could, by chance, coincide with human effort to uncover it. In this case, when the creational secret is discovered, it appears to be the outcome of that individual's search. However, in the deepest sense, Allah *Glorified is He* is manifesting the creational secret, and they are simply discovering it by chance; this is what Allah, does as a favour to humanity. Indeed, if one pays attention, he will notice that the overwhelming majority of breakthroughs happen by chance. That is to say, their discovery was not even ostensibly the outcome of human effort and preparation.

As for the Quran, it speaks of night and day in very general terms. In fact, nearly everyone, regardless of the level of scientific advancement in their societies or lack thereof, can comprehend: 'And We have established the night and the day as two symbols ...' (*al-Isra'*: 12). He also says: 'And it is He Who has made the night and the day, one following the other; [He has done it] for [the benefit of] the person who would care to receive exhortation and who would care to be grateful.' (*al-Furqan*: 62)

The word *khilfa'* (which appears in the verse as 'one following the other') indicates that day and night outstrip one another. This is something that we are able to confirm; indeed, we often witness the night outstripping the day, and vice versa. However, an interesting question would be asking how this process functioned at the dawn of creation.

As a first consideration, it would seem that if Earth, when first created, inclined on its axis in the direction of the sun, and this would mean that day preceded night and was not itself preceded by anything; in other words, it is only at the setting of the sun did night appear for the first time. On the other hand, if Earth, at the time it was created, was not inclined towards the sun, it would mean that Earth's first moments occurred at night.

Getting to the bottom of this issue would be nearly impossible if it were not for Allah's statement: And it is He Who has made the night and the day,

one following the other...' (*al-Furqan*: 62); that is from the beginning of creation, night and day have been succeeding one another. In order for this assertion to be regarded with seriousness or hold any weight, we must conclude that earth is round. Indeed, the side of the earth which is inclined towards the sun is experiencing daylight, while the side of the planet which is not inclined towards the sun (at any given time) is experiencing the darkness of night. Thus, the occurrences of day and night are happening at the same time. As earth revolves, night and day are succeeding each other; upon this understanding, the question of which came first has no meaning at all. At bottom, this reveals one of the fundamental aspects of the Quran: The mind is capable of comprehending its contents; you will never find the Quran to be at odds with sound reason and intellect.

Do you remember the time around the early thirties, specifically during the year 1928, when they had begun to explain the idea of the sky containing seven heavens as the seven planets that had been, which up until then being identified within the solar system? Undoubtedly, they adopted this interpretation in order to help people grasp the realities being discussed within the Quran; however Allah *Glorified is He* decreed that they would soon discover Neptune and Pluto.⁽¹⁾ The discoveries brought the total number of planets to nine, and through them Allah *the Exalted* exposed the weakness of their interpretation.

Creation is brimming with wonders. Many of which we are aware of; in fact, disbelievers have (unintentionally) helped us to realise some of the wonders of Allah's creation. Certainly, this creates the impression of Allah subduing creation and leaving it with no choice but to affirm (the necessity of) faith in Him.

Returning to our previous discussion, we would like to propose the following question: If we know that a day on earth consists of twenty-four hours, with alternating phases of night and day, what does this say about what constitutes a day on other planets? When they learnt of the orbits of other planets, which, of course, are also revolving around the Sun, they found that

(1) From linguist: This information is according to the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi *may Allah rest his soul*, and it was stated by him to further clarify certain points, but it does not necessarily conform to the scientific facts and information proven true. Pluto is no longer considered a planet.

the closest of them to the Sun was Mercury followed by Venus, then Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto, the farthest planet from the Sun.

When one considers the length of time a day comprises on each of these planets, he encounters one the most wondrous elements of Allah's creation. A day on Venus, for example, is equivalent to 244 days on Earth. As for its year, it consists of 225 days on Earth. This means a day on Venus is longer than a year (on Venus)! How is that? Specialists have responded by pointing out the differences between its rotation on its axis and its revolution around the Sun; therefore, regarding Venus, both of these are quite different from their corresponding equivalents for earth. Its rotation on its axis determines the length of its day, while its revolution around the sun determines the time of its year.

The statement of Allah *Glorified is He* "[Allah] has subjected the sun and the moon, each running [its course] for a specified term ...' (*Luqman*: 29) should be noted for the way in which it displays the precision of the Quranic address. Notice the way in which the verb tense being used changes from present in the early portion of the verse, 'Do you not see that Allah causes the night to enter the day and causes the day to enter the night?...' (*Luqman*: 29) to the past tense later on in the verse: '...has subjected...' (*Luqman*: 29). When speaking of the alteration of day and night, Allah says, '...Allah causes...' (*Luqman*: 29), but when speaking of the sun and the moon, He says: '...has subjugated...' (*Luqman*: 29). What is being indicated in this verse?

Some have pointed out that subjugating the sun and moon, i.e. making them subservient, was completed on a single occasion. Afterward, they simply continue to perform their respective functions. On the other hand, the shortening of the day and night is a continuous command that must be performed every day. In light of this, when discussing the latter, the use of the present tense verb is more accurate because it indicates repetition.

Next, moving our analysis to the statement of Allah *Glorified is He* '...each running [its course] for a specific term ...' (*Luqman*: 29), we find that it refers to the sun and moon completing the respective tasks they have been assigned. This also sheds some light upon why we refer to the final hour of each individual human being by the same name *ajal*. When this term is used along with the word *Musamma* (term, set, fixed, named, etc.), it actually refers to

the Day of Judgment. Indeed, on the basis of the previous observation, it seems as if the Creator is promising us that the sun and moon will perform their respective functions until the Day of Judgment. This is something we can exercise a measure of comfort and security concerning them.

Next, we must comment to ourselves: Truly, the heavenly body which illuminates the entire world was created by Allah, and He has ensured that it will perform this function until the Day of Judgment. Moreover, the sun is not in need of any maintenance or spare parts. Indeed, it is subservient, which means that it has no choice whatsoever about whether or not it wants to perform its duty of rising. Furthermore, this is not unique to the sun; the same thing can be said of the moon. In all, this subjugation of the heavenly bodies is one of the greatest expressions of Divine Mercy, an expression which believers and disbelievers alike must acknowledge.

Within this verse, the expression occurs as such: '...for a specified term...' (*Luqman*: 29). In other places within the Quran the expression is worded differently: '...for a term set [by Him] ...' (*Yusuf*: 2).

The same contrast can be observed in the thirteenth verse of the chapter of *Fatir* and the fifth verse of the chapter of *az-Zumar*, respectively. Each of these prepositional phrases conveys a specific meaning. The phrase, '...for a specified term...' (*Luqman*: 29) gives us a sense of the sun and moon traversing their individual courses before arriving at their set terms. Conversely, the phrase: '...for a term set [by Him]...' (*Fatir*: 13) conveys the sense that their (sun and moon) arrival at the set terms are immediate.

Just as we pointed out that night and day each have specific functions, the sun, and the moon also perform specific tasks. Indeed, this is what is intended by the following statement of Allah: 'He who made the sun a [source of] radiant light and the moon a light [reflected] ...' (*Yunus*: 5). In a different place, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Blessed is He Who has set up in the skies great constellations and has placed amongst them a [radiant] lamp and a light-giving moon.' (*al-Furqan*: 61); the sun is described as a radiant lamp because it produces light and heat. This differs significantly from the light of the moon which seems cool and reflector-like, for it does not produce any heat.

One of the amazing things about the moon is that, to us, it appears as though it is a piece of pearl, glowing, and suspended in the sky. Indeed, more than a few poets have compared their muses and lovers to the moon. If they knew the reality of the moon—as we do now—these comparisons would not be as romantic. We have recently learnt that the moon is only made up of rocks and other inanimate matter; it does not produce any light. Quite the reverse is true; it only reflects the light of the sun. Perhaps this explains why one ‘beloved’ muse rejected this comparison, when a poet compared her to the moon:

I likened her to the full moon, but this only humoured her, for she met my remarks with derision.

What this means is that his comparing her to the full moon was a cause for laughter.

She deemed my words silly and quipped, ‘When did I become unsightly enough to sustain such a comparison!’

This gives us occasion to ask: How did this woman know of the ‘unsightliness’ of the full-moon, a fact that the full-moon is made up of rocks that would hardly be considered beautiful? In her equally poetic response, she addresses this query:

The full moon does not gaze delightfully as I do, nor is its ‘smile’ free of gaps

It does not seductively remove the sash of its garment, nor does it wear necklaces around its neck

Alas! I pray that whoever compares my comeliness to the moon should remain a prisoner of disassociation with me

Therefore, the actual composition of the moon—whose knowledge we have only recently came upon—is amongst the apparent and hidden signs of Allah *Glorified is He* within creation. Through the use of science, Allah *the Exalted* has enabled us to acquire in-depth knowledge concerning the moon. Indeed, after travelling to the moon and traversing its surface became possible, we learnt that its surface is made up of dark rocks and stones that do not produce light. As previously mentioned, the moon only shines because it reflects the rays of the sun. As a result, moonlight shines on earth in the form of a calm, dreamy type of illumination. The moon appears as quoted, ‘Getting water out of a stone.’

The fact that the sun should be used to indicate the length of days and the moon used to indicate the length of months is also from amongst the immense Wisdom of the Creator *Glorified is He*. This separation of how time should be measured is the basis of all religious obligations. The moon, as opposed to the sun, has been chosen as the marker of the new month because it takes on a unique and distinctive shape at the beginning of the month. This explains the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'He it is Who has made the sun a source of radiant light and the moon a light [reflected] and has determined for it phases so that you might know how to compute the years and to measure [time]...' (*Yunus*: 5).

The impressiveness of the process through which Allah *the Almighty* charges creation with responsibilities and its connection to the phases of the moon, is shown ever so clearly concerning the occasion of the Pilgrimage (*Al-Hajj*). Indeed, the time of *Al-Hajj* moves throughout the solar calendar; one year it might occur during the winter, while it may occur during the summer in another year. When one thinks about it, this arrangement means that each person who is able to make the pilgrimage will be able to do so at a time which is appropriate for him. Thus, there is no excuse to neglect this religious obligation.

In fact, this idea of lunar time creating a situation in which *Al-Hajj* occurs at different times throughout the year has caused some to remark that the much sought after the Night of Power is roaming throughout the calendar—when lunar dates are compared with their solar equivalents. If we agree that the Night of Power occurs during the 27th night of *Ramadan*, it means that it might fall in the beginning of January during one year, February the next and in March the year after that. This is an expression of Allah's Mercy upon His servants.

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and that Allah, with whatever you do, is Acquainted?' (*Luqman*: 29). This serves as a potent reminder: Allah *Glorified is He* is still fully aware of all of your actions. In truth, He has—by His Knowledge, Wisdom, Power, and Self-subsistence—created the conditions in which you can perform your duties (religious and otherwise) in the most suitable way. In other words, He has commanded that you perform the actions which will aid you in organising and arranging your religious and worldly affairs. Thus, we find that *Ramadan* begins at night, the one in which the new

moon is sighted is considered the first of *Ramadan*. On the other hand, gathering upon the plain of 'Arafa is commemorated during the day, for this makes participating easier for a greater number of people.

The words of Allah *Glorified is He* '...and that Allah, with whatever you do, is Acquainted' (*Luqman*: 29) is attached to the His words which precede them: 'Do you not see that Allah causes ...' (*Luqman*: 29) mean that the latter portion of the verse can be approximated as the following: 'and that Allah, with whatever you do, is Acquainted' (*Luqman*: 29).

Afterward, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْحَقُّ وَأَنَّ مَا يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ الْبَاطِلُ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْكَبِيرُ ﴿٣٠﴾

**This is because God is the Truth, and what they invoke beside Him is false. He is the Most High, Most Great [30]
(The Quran, *Luqman*: 30)**

Allah *Glorified is He* begins the verse: 'Thus it is' (*Luqman*: 30); this refers to that which precedes it, namely the previous reference to the day entering the night, night entering day, and the subservience of the sun and moon (to terms appointed by Allah). All of the aforementioned realities and phenomena have only accrued 'because Allah alone is the Ultimate Truth' (*Luqman*: 30). Indeed, all of the realities and phenomena we enumerated stem from one of the attributes of Allah; He, namely the attribute of His being Allah the Ultimate Truth (*Al-Haqq*). The term *Al-haqq* refers to something well rooted and unchanging. If you look at the creational phenomena that we have been analyzing, they relate this concept of *Al-haqq* in that they are natural laws that govern the cosmos and all of creation (by the permission of Allah), and furthermore, they are well-rooted and unchanging. The nature of these laws is reflective of the One responsible for creating and originating them: 'Thus it is because Allah alone is the Ultimate Truth ...' (*Luqman*: 30).

In as much as Allah *Glorified is He* is *Al-Haqq*, the True Lord, those so-called 'partners' or 'sharers' in His Divinity that they invoke represent nothing besides falsehood: '...so that all that men invoke instead of Him is sheer falsehood ...' (*Luqman*: 30). Indeed, this implies that a right that is preserved for a single

individual cannot be shared by two individuals. If one of them rightfully deserves a single rank, the other must be deemed a mere false claimant to that rank. *Al-Haqq* is a single solitary entity; all that opposes it is false. Speaking of falsehood, what could be a grosser display of falsehood than their worship of idols, taking them as ‘gods’ and objects of divinity to be worshipped besides Allah?

How could they even consider such an absurd conclusion: Were these anything besides stones they fashioned with their own hands, erected and then proceeded to worship alongside Allah? Stones are just one of many types of inanimate objects contained within the earth. Amongst creation, inanimate objects are at the absolute bottom of the ‘totem pole’. They are subjected to the indiscriminate use of human beings, animals, and even plants. In a sense, inanimate objects are the permanent servants of all (categories of) living things.

In light of this, how can you, a human being who Allah has honoured and endowed with an active intellect, debase yourself by feeling contented to worship the lowest order of created things? This is precisely what you are doing if you take inanimate objects as objects of worship besides Allah. Moreover, you can witness what something as simple as a gust of wind can do to Al-lat or Al-‘Uzza: Blow them down and even perhaps break one of their limbs! Imagine, if one of their limbs was severed or damaged, your ‘god’ would be in need of repair! Thus, ‘...all that men invoke instead of Him is sheer falsehood ...’ (*Luqman*: 30).

Consistent with the same line of reasoning, we have made a point of mentioning that wars that break out amongst people do not involve two parties that may be said to equally fight for the cause of truth; on the contrary, the truth is always with one party. The truth is always solitary, and never multiple. If one party is upon the truth, it follows quite naturally that the other is upon falsehood. The alternative to such scenario that we have just mentioned is that both parties could be upon falsehood. Nevertheless, when truth and falsehood clash, the result is usually an expedient victory for truth: Falsehood, by its very nature, is constantly receding.

The end—even if it is the ultimate end—must be for truth. As we alluded to above, falsehood must eventually give way to the truth. Interestingly

enough, you will find that when war is engaged by opposing sides, both of whom are fighting for causes rooted in falsehood, the battles between them are prolonged. The reason being is that neither side is deserving of the help of Allah. They will continue on, engaged in bitter internecine warfare until they are mutually destroyed and the losses on both sides reach staggering proportions. In the end, if they hope for reconstruction and redevelopment, they will have to humbly resort to the path of rectification (in order to reclaim all that they had lost).

The same point can be recognised within the distribution of inheritance and the estates of the recently deceased. We often see those who are entitled to shares thereof resorting to bitter rivalry by retaining lawyers and filing cases in court in an effort to secure what they can of the wealth that has been left behind. In fact, even after the liquid assets of the inheritance have been given to the rightful inheritors, they will, in many instances, attempt to augment their legitimate holdings by dealing in falsehood. You see various sides expressing a willingness to collude in order to successfully divide the remaining wealth.

Regarding this, reading the following Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* which is instructive: 'Whoever gains wealth as a result of dealing in falsehood will have it consumed by Allah in the form of calamity and misfortune.'⁽¹⁾ The meanings of calamity and misfortune are identical in this respect. Actually, it implies that Allah *Glorified is He* will consume his illegitimate wealth in various ways. The money was acquired on the basis of falsehood; naturally, Allah, *the Almighty*, destroys it by causing it to be squandered on that which does not contain benefit.

Previously, we used an example to describe the difference between how illegitimate and unlawful earnings are consumed; we said they were like a father who returns to his home to find his son sick and suffering from an

(1) Cited by Ajluni within the text *Kashf Al-Khafa'* (2/313) in which he attributed it to a chain which includes Qada'i relating on the authority of Abu Salama Al-Hamsa, and subsequently going back to Prophet Muhammad. However, Abu Salama is an unreliable narrator, and his status as a companion of the Prophet is unsubstantiated. Subki maintained that he did meet Prophet Muhammad, but this is incorrect.

intense fever. As the father rushes the child to a physician, he is overcome by fear when he sees an apparition of his son's sickness. As the result of his fear, he proceeds to spend hundreds on his son's recovery. All the while, there is an individual who lives on an amount just sufficient to sustain him, making his living by the 'sweat of his brow'. Furthermore, he only derives his wealth from lawful and legitimate sources. If he is placed in a similar situation, he is sufficed by simply taking some aspirin and a cup of lemon juice. The essential difference between the two individuals we described is that the former earned his money unlawfully and illegitimately, while the latter earned his money in a lawful manner.

Therefore, the statement of Allah *Glorified is He* 'Thus it is because Allah alone is the Ultimate Truth ...' (*Luqman*: 30) implies that truth is evident and prevailing. Someone given to adopting contrarian stances would probably offer: How can this be true when we constantly see falsehood overcoming the truth and triumphing? We would respond by saying that although this can be true, falsehood does seem to gain the upper hand from time to time. However, this is only temporary. Indeed, during the times in which falsehood seems to be gaining the upper hand on the truth, it can be viewed as a soldier in truth's army. Of course, an assertion to this will demand an explanation: When falsehood is triumphing, it usually asserts itself by the use of tyranny; it is nearly inevitable that people will feel the lash of this tyranny. As falsehood abuses and violates them, they will begin to see truth as an alternative. As their desire for an alternative mode of living intensifies, their desire to experience the truth similarly intensifies.

In other words, if it were not for falsehood, we would not know the superiority of truth. A good example of this is the pain a human soul experiences to alert the body to the presence of illness and disease. Only after experiencing pain do you begin to request medication. Thus, the pain is a soldier in 'recovery's army'. We meant exactly the same thing when we say, 'Disbelief is a soldier in faith's army.'

In light of this, you should not despair when you see falsehood prevailing; as we mentioned, from time to time the prevalence of falsehood serves the cause of truth. Indeed, your Lord has mentioned: '[Whenever] He sends down

water from the sky, and [once-dry] river-beds are running high according to their measure ...' (*ar-Ra'd*: 17). This verse indicates that every valley is filled with water to its maximum capacity: '...the stream carries scum on its surface...' (*ar-Ra'd*: 17). This is referring to straw and other sediments that collect on the water's surface: '...and, likewise, from that [metal] which they smelt in the fire in order to make metals and utensils, there rises scum. In this way, does Allah set forth the parable of truth and falsehood ...' (*ar-Ra'd*: 17). This verse contains examples of each: '...as far as scum is concerned, it passes away...' (*ar-Ra'd*: 17). This means that it is rejected and placed at a distance because it is loathsome: '...but that which is of benefit to man abides on Earth. In this way, does Allah set forth the parables ...' (*ar-Ra'd*: 17).

After Allah *Glorified is He* clarified that He is '...the Ultimate Truth...' (*Luqman*: 30) and clarified that all other objects of worship, namely the gods of idolaters are falsehood, He *the Most High* concludes the verse by mentioning two of His other attributes: '...and because Allah alone is Exalted, Truly Great!' (*Luqman*: 30) He mentions the Exalted and Truly Great. Allah and His truthful Messenger, Prophet Muhammad, use these attributes when describing Him. Could there be a better precedent? Of course not, for as a result, we also use these attributes when describing Allah. However, the main idea in this verse is that those who disbelieve must also testify to Allah's worthiness of these two attributes. This explains why Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us to praise Him when a disbeliever is compelled to praise Him in spite of his disbelief. As a matter of fact, we covered a verse which demonstrates this perfectly earlier in this chapter: 'And if you ask them, "Who has created the heavens and the earth", they will certainly say, "Allah." Say, "All the praises and thanks be to Allah!" But most of them know not' (*Luqman*: 25).

This testimony of theirs deserves to be seconded by a believer; indeed, he should say, 'All praise is due to Allah.' This is a response to the first testimony, one which is issued by he who professed disbelief in Allah, declared His Messenger to be liar and made war against the Prophet. Furthermore, think deeply about a scenario in which this disbeliever who flagrantly rejected the Way of Allah and declared His Messenger to be false is afflicted with an illness, for example. Will he be able to deny the disease that he has been

afflicted with in the same manner that he denied Allah? The individual, who dismissed the Way of God and became an open rebel to Him, will he be able to rebel against death when it approaches?

Read the following verse of Allah: And when you encounter some distress on the sea, [at that time all] those [deities] whom you call upon are lost [to you], but not He. Yet when He brings you safe to the land, you turn away [from Him]. Of course, such a person is very ungrateful.' (*al-Isra*': 67) What this means is that at the point of hardship and difficulty, they are aware that they can only rely upon Allah. It is true; these are the times in which a human being does not delude himself or cling to things that he knows are untrue. By Allah! Have you ever seen someone in the midst of drowning, surrounded by waves, staring at his destruction right in the face, say, 'O, Hubal?!' Obviously, they recognise the futility of such supplications. Therefore, Allah is *the Exalted* the Truly Great, and everything taken is an object of worship besides Him represents falsehood.

Previously, we gave a parable for the human being. We particularly addressed a concept which offers that human beings are not given to the idea of cheating or deceiving themselves. This is especially true when they are forced to visit a shaman or as some call them 'healers'. Whatever name you prefer, we are referring to the individual who provides home remedies and cures for people who live away from big cities. In most cases, this local healer will attempt to belittle the practitioner of modern medicine by accusing him of being inexperienced. Nevertheless, when his son falls ill and he feels the situation has become grave, he will slink away in the darkness of night—to avoid the embarrassment of people witnessing him consult the doctor he attempted to demean—and make his way to the physician.

Allah is the only One Who truly possesses exaltedness. Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* is the only rightful possessor of haughtiness. When anyone, even a disbeliever (in Allah), is forced to confront circumstances which push him to the brink of his mortality and from which there is no conceivable escape, the only words of supplication he can utter are 'O, Allah! O, Lord!' Is this anything other than an acknowledgement of Allah from them?

After establishing the testimony, to Allah's Greatness, of those who ostensibly disbelieve in Him, Allah mentions that He is Exalted. Next, He follows the attribute of Exaltedness by mentioning that He is Truly Great. Indeed, someone can wind up occupying an exalted station as the result of usurpation and other factors which would indicate that he is not deserving of the rank which he occupies. This explains why the Allah *the Almighty* mentions that He is Exalted and Truly Great, for this is by virtue of His inherent greatness that He is worthy of the exalted rank He assumes.

Afterward, Allah *Glorified is He* turns our attention to another sign of His Deity within creation:

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ الْفُلَّكَ تَجْرِي فِي الْبَحْرِ بِنِعْمَتِ اللَّهِ لِيُرِيَكُمْ مِنْ
 ءَايَاتِهِ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّكُلِّ صَبَّارٍ شَكُورٍ ﴿٣١﴾

**[Prophet], do you not see that ships sail through the sea,
 by the grace of God, to show you [people] some of His
 wonders? Truly there are signs in this for every steadfast,
 thankful person [31] (The Quran, *Luqman*: 31)**

After Allah *Glorified is He* has mentioned some of the more abstruse signs within creation, He now desires to turn our attention to some of His signs we witness during our daily comings and goings. He began the verse: Do you not see that the ships sail through the sea carrying bounty by the favour of Allah?... (Luqman: 31). The portion of the verse which reads, 'Do you not see' should be taken to mean, 'Do you not know'. The word 'ships' which occurs in the verse refers to the well-known seafaring vessels.

Perhaps Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had never personally witnessed these ships traversing the waters of the sea. Even the ships that were in use during that time were nothing like the mountainous ocean liners that have appeared during our time. Indeed, this is being alluded to within the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'And His are the lofty ships that sail like [floating] mountains through the seas.' (*ar-Rahman*: 24)

When did multi-level structures which almost appear like mountains first appear? They have only appeared recently. Therefore, these references must

be regarded as expressions of the miracle of the Quran—it foretold the invention and proliferation of a technology that had yet to be introduced at the time it was revealed. This can also be observed within the following statement of Allah *Glorified is He* 'And were it not that [with the prospect of boundless riches before them] all people would become one [evil] community, We might indeed have provided for those who [now] deny the Most Gracious roofs of silver for their houses and [silver] stairways whereon to ascend.' (*az-Zukhruf*: 33)

If one looks at the Quran intently, he will find a number of verses which establish not only its veracity but also the truthfulness of the Messenger of Allah, Prophet Muhammad in what he conveyed from Allah.

We have already mentioned the story of the woman who embraced Islam after she read an account of Islamic history. She read some of the prophetic biography and in particular came across the story of how the believers would take turns guarding and defending Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from his enemies. She was surprised when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* relieved these guards from such service by saying, 'Verily, Allah has revealed the following verse unto me: '...And Allah will protect you from [disbelieving] men ...' (*al-Ma'ida*: 67). The woman paused at this verse and said to herself: 'By God, even if this man would be content to deceive the masses, he would not deceive himself and risk his own life!'

As we pointed out above, the meaning of 'Do you not see...' (*Luqman*: 31) is 'Do you not know'. The verb *tara* (which literally means 'to see') is used within the Arabic original. This implies that the information you learn directly from Allah is more conclusive and unerring than that which you witness with your eyes.

Let us continue to the portion of the verse which reads: '...sail through the sea carrying bounty by the favour of Allah ...' (*Luqman*: 31). The words 'sail through' imply, at the very least, steady movement from place to place. Beyond that basic description, the movement can either take place calm and placidly or quick and pacey. However, we would like to focus our attention on inquiring, 'How is the movement (of ships) counted from amongst Allah's favours?' First of all, one must understand that the first ships were made out

of pieces of plywood that were bound together by rope and dowels. The draft of such ships would usually only contain water up to about the depth of a hand span, the draft being the distance between its water line and the lowest part of its hull, water needed to be removed from the draft at different rates according to the weight of the ship. In the event that additional weight was laid upon the draft, it would dip, which allowed more water to enter. If the weight of the water exceeded the weight of the ship and its freightage, the ship would sink.

This idea was used in the construction of the submarine. Balloons are used to complete the movement of the submarine when it is underwater. Now, it is a normal occurrence for us to see huge ocean liners built from steel. Nevertheless, the way the soft flowing water steadies the solid iron ship and transports it is a cause for wonder. Indeed, the process is as simple as allowing the wind to blow the ship into the direction that you desire. In fact, windsailing is so effective that one can even flow against the current if he utilises the sails properly. By the use of a few simple implements, the captain of the ship is capable of steering the sail in any direction, and the ship will follow suit and flow upon his chosen course—even against the direction of the wind! They refer to this manoeuvre as declivity (*tasfih*). This explains the following statement of Allah concerning the movement of ships: 'if He so wills, He stills the wind, and then they lie motionless on the sea's surface ...' (*ash-Shura*: 33).

It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is clarifying that—by His irresistible Power—one of the least dense objects in creation can be made to carry an extremely dense object. In fact, for another example of the same phenomenon, it would be instructive to look at the tractors which pull heavy loads. We know that these huge tractors are capable of pulling tons of steel; however, what are powering them, or in other words, how are they able to move? They make use of the compressed air being funnelled through the wheels. If truth be told, the power derived from the air is so abundant that it can become dangerous: The tractor being powered by the compressed air runs the risk of the pressure becoming consumed within the wheels, in which case the wheels will explode.

The statement of Allah, '...[He has ordained it so] that He may show some of His signs to you ...' (*Luqman*: 31) is asserting that Allah *Glorified is He*

desires to show humanity some of the remarkable elements of His creation, especially concerning the seas. In the past, we were not fully aware of the life forms that existed in the depths of the sea; aside from the fish that were caught by fishermen, we were unaware of the other life which existed in the sea. Now, on the other hand, with the development of marine biology and photography, namely pictures that can now be taken underwater, we are able to witness more breath-taking seascape than we do landscape!

Next, we will turn our attention to the portion of the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...Surely, in this are important signs for every patiently persevering and grateful person.' (*Luqman*: 31) Allah's mentioning the following. '...for every patiently persevering ...' (*Luqman*: 31) reveals that in spite of the fact that His signs abound within creation, each individual must make an effort to uncover His signs through a persistent and patient search. Patience is very important when engaging this search, for one will inevitably encounter difficulty and hardship, especially if the signs he wishes to uncover are hidden beneath the sea. Look again at this portion of the verse; however, this time read how Allah *Glorified is He* follows His mention of those who are patient in adversity: '...for every patiently persevering and grateful person.' (*Luqman*: 31) Indeed, if we are allowed to witness the wondrous seascape that Allah *the Almighty* has endowed the depths of His creation with, we are obligated to show gratefulness. Remember, gratefulness is only shown for a new blessing that you have received.

Essentially, Allah *the Exalted* desires that we encounter His signs in creation with inquisitiveness, reflection, and ultimately contemplation. The opposite of these would be receiving Allah's signs with heedlessness, or worse, denial and ambivalence. Allah *Glorified is He* has mentioned this in the following Statement: And many are the signs in the heavens and the earth, which they pass by turning away [arrogantly] from them.' (*Yusuf*: 105)

Mentioning those whom He was referring 'for every patiently persevering' before mentioning 'grateful person' is an indication that patience in the face of adversity which is often associated with work, research, reaching conclusions and discovery will lead to great blessings, those which will necessitate gratefulness.

Afterward, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلِذَا غَشِيَهُمْ مَّوْجٌ كَالظِّلِّ دَعَوْا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ فَلَمَّا نَجَّاهُمْ إِلَى
الْبَرِّ فَمِنْهُمْ مُقْنَصِدٌ وَمَا يَجْحَدُ بِآيَاتِنَا إِلَّا كُلُّ خَتَّارٍ كَفُورٍ ﴿٣٢﴾

**When the waves loom over those on board like giant shadows they call out to God, devoting their religion entirely to Him. But, when He has delivered them safely to land, some of them waver – only a treacherous, thankless person refuses to acknowledge Our signs [32]
(The Quran, *Luqman*: 32)**

The verse opens with the Words: when a huge wave covers [the sailors] ' (*Luqman*: 32). This conjures up images of a party out to sea being completely covered and enclosed by waves. This is drawn into sharper relief by the following simile: '...like [so many] canopies ...' (*Luqman*: 32).

Remember, a canopy normally describes something which towers above a human being and covers him. Likewise, describing a wave as canopy conveys the sense that the wave is taller than the human beings aboard the vessel. This means that the water has ceased to flow calmly and monotonously, and instead, has collected and risen above those on board like a great canopy. Most assuredly, this is what Allah *Glorified is He* intends by the following verse as well: 'And [make them recall the time] when We shook [due to the quake] the Mount [Sinai] above them, as though it were to be a shade above them [like a wall] ...' (*al-A'raf*: 171).

If you ever go out to sea, you will witness phenomena such as these. You can look from far away and see waves many times larger than you. Due to its massive size, when viewing one of these waves you conclude that it could very easily wipe you out. However, when the wave approaches, you experience yet another manifestation of Allah's gentleness: It disintegrates and passes tranquilly beneath you. When one reflects upon this, it is really something remarkable, something for which we should show gratitude.

The wave being described within the verse is a terrifying sight. Thus, when it engulfs them, they are assured of their demise: '...they call upon

Allah bearing sincere faith in Him...' (*Luqman*: 32). They are calling unto Allah *the Almighty* in spite of the fact that they disbelieve in Him. Yet, in situations like these, a human being does not deceive or lie to himself. This verse is describing what takes place when matters become critical: He will not call upon Al-Lat or Al-'Uzza, nor will any among them cry out, 'O, Hubal!' At this critical moment, they will sincerely call upon Allah *the Exalted*. Even if they are given to the worship of idols, when faced with their mortality (at a moment like the one being described in the verse), they will direct their worship exclusively to Allah *Glorified is He*. This 'change of heart' (so to speak) is a reflection of their acknowledgement of the inability of their idols to aid them; this is an acknowledgement that their idols are absolutely devoid of any ability to harm or benefit them. Benefit and the removal of affliction or tribulation rest in the hand of Allah, the True Lord.

One may comment, 'Yes, this is accurate in describing the state of their worship in a life and death situation. Nonetheless, what moved them to neglect the worship of Allah for the worship of idols in the first place?' We would respond by pointing out that religiousness is something inherent to the human soul. This is something that humanity has retained from their earliest moments, i.e. from the time Allah *Glorified is He* created Adam. Adam's progeny was taken from his loins; after which, they were made to bear witness on their own accounts: '...Am I not your Sustainer...' (*al-A'raf*: 172). Naturally, they testified to Allah's position as their Sustainer.

All of us have at least one atom within our physical make-ups which witnessed the taking of this covenant. This atom, or particle, is the source of all of the heavenly illuminations that occur within the soul of the believer. Accordingly, every believer should move to preserve this particle by taking its 'service manual' from the One responsible for its creation. Conversely, one should never allow the spiritual light which emanates from this source to be obscured by neglecting the rules of maintenance that its Lord has prescribed. If one is not careful, he could wind up like the individual Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned with the following Words: 'But as for him who shall turn away from remembering Me, his shall be a life of narrow scope, and on the Day of Resurrection, We shall raise him up blind.' (*Ta Ha*: 124)

Additionally, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has clarified this issue for us by saying, 'Every child is born on the innate religion of goodness. Afterwards, his parents raise him as a Jew, a Christian or fire-worshipper.'⁽¹⁾

A human soul can always be said to possess a measure of good as long as something of these initial Divine illuminations remain within it. Lest we forget, these Divine illuminations were produced by the covenant in which we bore witness to Allah's Lordship. On the other hand, if a soul's light becomes obscured or foggy, moral corruption and ultimately disappointment will result.

In light of the preceding points, we can conclude that religiousness is innate to the human soul. However, what is more, and often neglected, is the fact that religiousness has demands and an attendant set of instructions which affect what the religious person is to do as well as refrain from doing. Strangely enough, there are some people who would be pleased to assume a religious identity; however, they wish to sidestep the obligations of religious commitment. What is such a person to do? Well, they can make the object of their religious devotion something which does not require anything of them. This was the basis of much of the idolatry and idol worship that was practised amongst them.

To summarise, we have but one thing to offer someone who worships idols: There will come a time in your life when you would not consider relying upon an idol, a time in which you will only turn to Allah, the True Lord. The irony of this will be that you are being forced to rely upon the One Whose worship you turned away from simply because you wanted to sidestep the obligations that pertain to His worship in the first place! Assuredly, this will take place; the nature of life with its shifting vicissitudes bears this fact: Willingly or unwillingly, you will be forced to rely upon Allah. This reminds me of saying in our colloquial dialect: 'You do not want to see his face, but circumstances will force you to need his back.'

(1) The authenticity of this Hadith is agreed upon. It was worded by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4775) and likewise by Muslim in his Sahih (2658). The Hadith was narrated in the authority of Abu Hurayra, who related that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, "There is not a single newborn that is not born upon the innate religion of goodness." (The rest of the Hadith is quoted above).

Consider this: You have turned away from Allah and disbelieved in Him. Yet, when you are placed in a critical circumstance, like being surrounded by waves and facing death, you become like little rabbits! Why are you resorting to Allah now? What has prevented you from persisting in your inflexibility and arrogance before Allah?

Then Allah *Glorified is He* moves on to say: ‘...but as soon as He has brought them safe ashore, some of them stop halfway [between belief and unbelief]...’ (*Luqman*: 32) After they have recognized Allah as the True Lord *Glorified is He* after they have prayed to Him for aid and placed their trust in Him and perhaps most importantly, after He has delivered and rescued them, their believing in Him and obeying Him should be something taken for granted. We would expect this experience—which shook them tremendously—to have a profound impact on them. Yet, they return to the disbelief and disavowal (of Allah) that was their hallmark before Allah rescued them. In other words, they return to submitting to their undisciplined passions and whims. This is how the disbeliever responds when he faces adversity and trial: He reverts (to disbelief) and does not use his experience as a reminder. The situation of the believer is the exact opposite; when he is subjected to a test like this one, it increases him in faith and certainty.

The idea of stopping halfway between belief and unbelief (as represented in the Arabic term *muqtasid* which describes someone in between to definite states: When faced with calamity and turbulence, he returns to Allah, but when this trial is removed from him, this spirit (of exclusive servitude to Allah) weakens and he reverts. This represents a particular type of person; this becomes evident when we consider the following statement of Allah *the Exalted*: ‘...Yet none could knowingly reject Our messages unless he be utterly perfidious, ingrate.’ (*Luqman*: 32) The last part of the verse also represents a particular type of person: The individual who stops halfway between belief and unbelief is distinct from the individual who knowingly rejects Allah’s messages.

The façade of disbelief that some of them put on must begin to crack when the impulse of faith is awakened inside them. Nonetheless, when they are saved the world deceives them again. On the other hand, some of them are downright ingrates, themselves actively engaged in their own deception.

You should be cognizant of the sharp contrast that exists between the wholly patient and the individual that has been described with perfidy, as well as the difference between the deeply grateful and the ingrate.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* addresses all women and men:

يَتَأْتِيهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ وَأَخْشَوْا يَوْمًا لَا يَجْزِي وَالِدٌ عَنْ وَلَدِهِ وَلَا
مَوْلُودٌ هُوَ جَازٍ عَنِ وَالِدِهِ شَيْئًا إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ فَلَا تَغُرَّنَّكُمُ
الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا وَلَا يَغُرَّنَّكُمُ بِاللَّهِ الْغُرُورُ ﴿٣٣﴾

People, be mindful of your Lord and fear a day when no parent will take the place of their child, nor a child take the place of their parent, in any way. God's promise is true, so do not let the present life delude you, nor let the Deceiver delude you about God [33] (The Quran, *Luqman*: 33)

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* begins His address to His servants by saying 'O Men!' it is an indication that He desires to grant all of them felicity in Hereafter. We have already mentioned the Noble Hadith in which the earth exclaimed, 'O Lord, permit me to cave in around the son of Adam!' And in which the seas said: 'O Lord...to drown the son of Adam, etc. The Creator *the Exalted* responded to these requests: "Leave My creation to Me. If you were responsible for their creation, you would deal mercifully with them. If they repent unto Me, I am their beloved; and if they fail to repent unto me, I am their healer."⁽¹⁾

Moving on, I would like you to focus your attention on the statement of Allah *Glorified is He* '...Be conscious of your Lord...' (*Luqman*: 33). The word

(1) Cited by Ghazali in *Ihya'* 'Ulum Ad-Din (4/52), it was a popular saying among some members of the Pious Ancestors. The version which is attributed to them is worded as follows: "There is not a single servant who commits a sin except that the place within the earth where he is standing asks permission to cave in around him. While this is happening, the sky is also asking permission to fall upon him in smithereens. To the earth and sky, Allah *Glorified is He* replies: 'Restrain yourselves from harming My servant and give him respite. Indeed, neither of you created him; if he was your creation you would deal mercifully with him. Perhaps he will repent to Me; in which case I will forgive him. Or perhaps he will replace his misdeeds with righteous actions which will be a cause for Me granting him reward.'

taqwa (which could be approximated above as consciousness) means to place a protective barrier between yourself and that which harms you. This explains the statement of Allah *the Exalted* which occurs elsewhere: ‘and beware of the fire...’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 131). In both of these verses *taqwa* (expressed in the former as ‘be conscious’ and in the latter as ‘beware’) conveys the same meaning. The declaration ‘be conscious of Allah’ is a command to erect a protective barrier between yourself and the attributes of Allah that tell of His overwhelming might and vengefulness. The phrase, ‘beware of the fire’ connotes the same thing: Place a barrier between yourself and the fire.

The address contained within this verse is directed to all people: those who disbelieve as well as those who believe. Allah wants to enter all of them in to the fold of faith and obedience. There is not a single one among them Allah does not desire to show generosity, favour, and aid. It is as if Allah is saying to them: Not only do I desire the treasures of the life of this world for you; but I want to give you the blessing of the Hereafter as well.

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was also merciful with all people; even with those who had professed disbelief in his message and persisted therein. This brings the story of the Jewish man who attempted to accuse a Muslim of stealing a coat of armour. It was considered a blow to Muslim pride for a member of the community to be accused of theft; as such, they resolved to remunerate the Jewish man. However, afterward, they presented the case to the Prophet, how would he decide?

At this point Allah *Glorified is He* aided the Prophet, and intervened, revealing the following verse: ‘Behold, we have bestowed upon you from on high this Book, setting forth the truth so that you may judge between people in accordance with what Allah has taught you...’ (*an-Nisa*’: 105). Hence, he is not strictly a judge for the believers: ‘...do not contend with those who are false to their trust...’ (*an-Nisa*’: 105). That is to say: Don’ not argue on behalf of someone given to treachery; even if he happens to be a Muslim. Commanding to justice is dictated by faith: Before the dictates of faith all people are equal.

It should be noted that there is a difference between the command, ‘Be conscious of your Lord’ and the command, ‘Be conscious of Allah.’ The difference hinges on the idea that the divine generosity that emanates from

Allah's position as Lord is different from the generosity that stems from His position as God. The former is expressed in Allah's originating creation and protecting them from being destitute by providing for them. Additionally, the edification and cultivation that Allah grants humanity—in His capacity as Lord—is given to believers and disbelievers. Allah's generosity which reflects His position as Allah, conversely, is expressed in Him granting (some among creation) the will to perform the actions He has commanded—in a spirit of worship and obedience. Within the verse we are currently examining, Allah chose to refer to exhort people to be conscious of Him while referring to Himself as Lord, i.e., the One Who created and cultivated. It is as if Allah is informing all men and women: God-consciousness should be an expression of gratitude for the favour Allah has shown you; even if you have ultimately proven to be ungrateful for this favour.

This matter is not concluded with the simple command to be conscious of Allah within the life of this world. In fact, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and stand in awe of the Day on which no parent will be of any avail to his child...' (*Luqman*: 33).

This is a command to fear the day you will be returned to your Lord. The word 'day' can occur as an adverb denoting time or as a noun—which conforms to all of the rules of grammar. If a future occurrence is mentioned in connection with the word, it is classified as an adverb, for instance: 'The strenuous review required for the test is something I fear on that day.' In this example the fear is being produced by the test; not by the day. Conversely, if you said, 'I fear the day of the test,' it would mean that you are afraid of everything connected with that day. In other words, you fear the day itself.

The statement, '...stand in awe of the Day...' (*Luqman*: 33) implies that the 'Day' itself is frightening, not to mention the reckoning that will occur. During this 'Day:' '...no parent will be of any avail to his child...' (*Luqman*: 33). Here, Allah especially mentions the parent and child. Allah has advised people to be kind to their fellow men and women in general, however, He has singled parents out for good treatment in His well-known statement: 'And [Allah says:] 'We have enjoined upon man goodness towards his parents...' (*Luqman*: 14).

Directly following His advice concerning the treatment of parents, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions its basis: ‘...be grateful towards Me and towards your parents....’ (*Luqman*: 14) In this, we recognize that Allah has given parents special distinction, favour, and rank with Him. The role of parents has been emphasized so thoroughly that it would not be farfetched to assume they possessed the ability to benefit us on the Day of Judgment. With this verse, Allah is clarifying that for all the benefit parents provide their children with in the life of this world, on the Day of Judgment that benefit will be restricted. Every soul will be preoccupied with its own fate; no one will be able to benefit others, even if those others were the people closest to him in the life of this world.

In the chapter of *al-Baqara*, Allah says: ‘and remain conscious of [the coming of] a Day when no human being shall in the least avail another...’ (*al-Baqara*: 48). Within this verse, Allah asserts that no human being will be able to avail another: This takes the idea that no parent will be able to avail his child and generalizes it so that it suspends the idea of any person benefiting someone else.

Statements nearly identical to the above-mentioned verse have occurred in two places in the Quran. These two verses begin the same way but end differently. In fact, they discuss two types of souls: The first is the soul which seeks to intercede on behalf of someone else, while the second is the soul which is deserving of punishment—but vicariously rescued by someone else; in the sense that someone else assumes responsibility for their bad deeds. The verse which focuses on the soul which is hoping for some sort of vicarious atonement ends thus, ‘...nor shall ransom be accepted from any of them, nor shall intercession be of any use to them...’ (*al-Baqara*: 123).

Ransom refers to the money paid for someone’s redemption. When this type of soul first realizes its reckoning it will look to avert punishment by ransom, but none will be accepted. However, it will not fall into despair; on the contrary, it will begin seeking an intercessor from among the people of high standing and elevated rank (with Allah) to serve as its medium before Allah. Sadly (for this soul at least), this will also be of no help.

As for the soul which seeks to benefit someone else by its good works, it looks to intercession right away. Only after the possibility of intercession has been negated does it attempt to offer ransom. This explains why the negation of intercession occurs before the negation of ransom within the latter verse: It is discussing the soul which benefits others by its good works. Therefore, the end of the first verse is addressed to the soul that may harbour hopes of evading punishment by ridding itself of the bad deeds it earned, while the second verse is addressed to the soul that harbours hopes of benefiting someone else with its good deeds.

Refocusing our attention on the current verse: ‘...no parent will be of any avail to his child (*walad*)...’ (*Luqman*: 33), we find the reason behind its mention is that a parent is always willing to show his child compassion. When a father witnesses his son being punished he will want to offer himself in his place. First, Allah mentions the parent, i.e. the parents' desire to offer themselves in place of their children. Next, He says: ‘...nor an offspring (*mawlud*) will in the least avail his parent...’ (*Luqman*: 33). Here, when mentioning the inability of children to benefit their parents, Allah changes the wording slightly. Instead of saying (*walad*) child He opts to say *mawlud* a word which also means child but highlights the child's origin from its parents, one might say ‘offspring’. Consistency would dictate that the word *walad* be used in the latter clause just as it was used in the former. Why did Allah change the wording here?

These are Allah's words. As such, His choice to use an alternative word is significant, i.e., there is a palpable difference between the words *walad* and *mawlud*. Indeed, many of the early Muslims had fathers who died upon disbelief. They (the Muslims) thought Allah's Commandment to treat parents well meant that they would be able to intercede for them on the Day of Judgment. Allah revealed this verse in order to remove their misgivings about alleviating the burdens of their fathers who died upon disbelief. This is why Allah did not use the word *walad* here—but instead used the word *mawlud*: *Mawlud* highlights the direct link between the parents and the children. Indeed, one is called the *walad* of his grandfather, and his grandfather is called his *walid* (father); irrespective of the years and generations that separate them. Thus, if intercession from the *mawlud*—for his parents—will

not be accepted, it goes without saying that his intercession for his grandfather will also be rejected. To highlight this connection; when Allah changes the wording from *walad* to *mawlud* Allah's speech must always be viewed as purposeful; never haphazard.

Yet, there is another question we must address here: When does the parent attempt to avail his child and when does the child attempt to avail his parents? Addressing this issue, many have pointed to the dependency of children on their parents: The child is in constant need of tenderness and care from the parent. Whenever a parent notices his child in pain he rushes to comfort him and relieve him of the pain. Alternatively, the child is not as concerned about relieving the parent of pain, but rather, diligently defends the parent from ridicule and harassment. Thus, the parent defends the child against pain, and the child defends the parent against humiliation and ridicule: Each of these is significant.

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...Verily, Allah's promise [of resurrection] is true indeed...' (*Luqman*: 33). We know that a promise is defined as: information concerning a forthcoming event that will please the one being told when it occurs. The opposite of a promise is a threat which is defined as: a declaration of the intent to cause someone harm in the future. With both terms defined, we would like to pose the following question: What is the purpose of either of these?

The purpose of a promise is to prompt one to take the means to prepare for it. A promise motivates one to work and strive to actualize it. A good example of this is the promise you might make to reward your child if he passes a test. As we mentioned, the opposite of a promise is a threat: It foretells of something which frightens you. As a result, you are likely to become cautious and take the necessary means to avoid it.

In essence, the promise of Allah is truth just as His threat is truth. The special mention of His promise here suggests that He intends to give souls what they desire. His threat, conversely, entails preventing people from indulging their desires. Previously, we clarified this issue by highlighting that Allah speaks about blessings, or gifts; yet, from the perspective of those who receive them, there are negative and positive gifts.

In this connection, read the following statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘A flash of fire will be let loose upon you, and smoke, and you will be left without succour! Which, then, of your Lord’s favours will you disavow?’ (*ar-Rahman*: 35 - 36)

To be sure, paradise is a blessing for which we should show gratitude—Allah has given it to the believers out of His mercy. What, then, could possibly be the blessing in flashes of fire, smoke, and punishment? In responding to this question, many have concluded that the flash of fire, smoke, and punishment being mentioned here are blessings because they represent a threat of punishment from Allah. As such, they prompt one to distance himself from the things which lead to it, and thus save himself before falling into punishment. The truest expression of the blessing contained in this and other threats from Allah is that He does not punish us before warning us of His punishment. On the contrary, He informs us of the danger before we arrive at it.

Again, to reiterate: The Promise of Allah is truth. Indeed, it is a promise from One Who is capable of effectuating all that He promises, and realizing all that He says will happen. As for others, they are not in total control of the factors which affect their ability to fulfil their promises. Therefore, a promise from other than Allah *Glorified is He* cannot be described as truth. This must explain Allah’s words in the chapter of *al-Kahf*, when He said: ‘And never say about anything, “Behold, I shall do this tomorrow”, without [adding], “if Allah so wills...”’ (*al-Kahf*: 23-24).

You could make an earnest promise, and truly intend to fulfil it—as you may see yourself as reasonably capable of its fulfilment. However, you can not guarantee that you will retain your ability to fulfil your promise. In fact, even if you personally remain committed to the fulfilment of your promise, circumstances may change and your ability to come through might be altered. Remember, none of the factors that ultimately determine your ability to make good on something you said are in your hands—in an ultimate sense.

In light of this, we should observe proper decorum with Allah: We should leave the ultimate outcome of events to the One Who possesses the unrestricted ability to effectuate all that He promises. Thus, when I say that I am not going to do something in the future, I always append that statement with ‘if Allah so

wills.’ In doing this, you provide yourself with a cushion if the situation changes and you fall through on your ability to deliver, you can always say: ‘I was fully intent on doing so and so, but it was not Allah’s will that it be done.’

Indeed, it nearly seems as if our Lord *the Exalted* wants to hide our dishonesty; as if He wants our weakness of will to remain concealed. He has informed us that it is better to consign the outcome of affairs to Him *Glorified is He*. In this sense, the divinely preordained will serve as a mechanism which enables the servants of Allah to deal with each other more tolerantly. It is common for us to say, ‘It was not Allah’s will,’ when we are unable to make good on a promise, ‘What do you want me to do,’ we often continue. To be sure, nothing can occur on earth until after it has been predestined in the heavens.

As long we are in the protective space provided by the divinely preordained will of Allah, and all of us recognize its wisdom, you should not get angry with me if I am unable to come through on my end of a promise; and I should extend you the same the courtesy. When an intelligent person does a favour for someone else he knows wholeheartedly that he has only been the means of that action being performed; he wasn’t the cause of anything. In an ultimate sense, Allah’s preordained will is what causes things to occur. In terms of the intelligent person we just spoke of, his was an affair in which what he wanted to do was in conformity with what Allah wanted. It almost seems that Allah is honouring him by allowing him to perform this action. Although we have mentioned it a few times, this is a good time to recount what we have always held about physicians who are firm in their belief in Allah, they should say: ‘The cure comes through me but not from me.’ The doctor administers medical procedures, but the healing and cures come from Allah. In summary, the only promise which qualifies to be described as a ‘promise of truth is the promise of Allah *the Exalted*.

In as much as we have established that the promise of Allah is truth, one must take the necessary measures to do what He has promised will lead to good, and to avoid that which He has promised leads to evil. Do not allow yourself to be deceived by the world: ‘...let not, then, the life of this world delude you...’ (*Luqman*: 33). This refers to the world’s capacity to delude men and women with its luxuries and comforts. Indeed, the world is but an elaborate mirage: there is

nothing behind what you see. Allah *Glorified is He* addressed this with His statement: 'Did you, then, think that We created you in mere idle play, and that you would not have to return to Us?' (*al-Mu'minun*: 11)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us an example of the life of this world and its deceptiveness: 'And propound unto them the parable of the life of this world...' (*al-Kahf*: 45). Allah *Glorified is He* has named the life of this world (*dunya*); if truth be told, there is not a name that could be more accurate in conveying its worthlessness: '...like the water which We send down from the skies, and which is absorbed by the plants of the earth: but [in time] they turn into dry stubble which the winds blow freely about...' (*al-Kahf*: 45); there could not be a more accurate description of the world: It dazzles and impresses, but is short-lived. I suppose one could say, 'the life of this world begins convincingly and persuasively but ends disappointingly.'

Let us refocus our attention on Allah's statement: '...let not [your own] deceptive thoughts about Allah delude you' (*Luqman*: 33). *Gharur* (Which corresponds to the phrase 'deceptive thoughts' used in the translation) conveys a sense of being deceived through temptation. Indeed, one of the poets⁽¹⁾ of the pre-Islamic period has brought this word to life. This couplet of poetry is set in a dialogue he is having with his lover:

O Fatimah, would you stop acting indifferent to me,
 If you are firm in your intention to part with me, please let me
 down gently
 Are you deluded to such behaviour by knowing that your love
 has such a hold over me
 And that no matter what you command of my heart, it will
 comply helplessly

The meaning of deluded (as it is mentioned above) means: Is there something whose temptation has led you to behave this way; that is, is there some reason you are conducting yourself as if you are proceeding in the shadows and are unable to see clearly.

(1) *He is Imru' Al-Qays, and the verses being quoted here are from of the poems that received the distinction of being posted on the Ka'ba.*

The word *gharur* also refers to Satan (Iblis) who, for all intents and purposes, has many different mechanisms and means through which he deludes people. He has ways which he attempts to delude the obedient (servants of Allah) and ways which deludes the disobedient servants of Allah. Each of these represents a particular set of gimmicks and tricks that Satan (Iblis) will employ to delude the servant—based on whether he/she is obedient or disobedient. Unsurprisingly, when he dupes the disobedient it results in disobedience; he comes to the disobedient servant and persuades him to view his Lord as forgiving and merciful; he points out that his forefather, Adam *peace be upon him* sinned but was ultimately forgiven by Allah. For this reason, after reading the following verses: ‘O man! What is it that lures you away from your bountiful Lord, who has created you, and formed you in accordance with what you are meant to be, and shaped your nature in just proportions’ (*al-Infitar*: 6-7) one righteous man commented, ‘I have been lured away by His bounty,’ he said ‘He created me and made my form pleasing; dealt with me honourably and even overindulged me. As a result, I have become deluded (concerning my own worth), if Allah would have dealt with us harshly we would not have become deluded.’

Once there was a man who was indebted five piasters to one of his fellows, so he paid his debt. Once the individual who received the payment opened the coffer he found it filled with money (far more than the five piasters he was due). After he returned the extra money to the one who was indebted, the latter said, ‘By Allah, if you were really noble you would have accepted the payment without checking it.’ Interestingly enough, a preacher (who obviously knew of this occurrence) wanted to use it to teach the man who was owed the debt a lesson concerning his prayers. He did not focus during his prayers, so the preacher said to him: I find the way you perform your prayers unimpressive; you look like a chicken pecking seeds (going up and down really quickly). Have you ever thought about this: If someone who owed you money attempted to pay his debt with you (this is perhaps an allusion to the prayer; that could be considered a debt he owes Allah) gave you an old and unsatisfactory note, would you accept it? Humorously, the man responded, ‘If I were really noble I would accept it instead of returning it to him.’

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* concludes the chapter of Luqman with the following verse:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ عِلْمُ السَّاعَةِ وَيُنَزِّلُ الْغَيْثَ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا فِي الْأَرْحَامِ وَمَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ
مَّاذَا تَكْسِبُ غَدًا وَمَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ بِأَيِّ أَرْضٍ تَمُوتُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ ﴿٣٤﴾

Knowledge of the Hour [of Resurrection] belongs to God; it is He who sends down the relieving rain and He who knows what is hidden in the womb. No soul knows what it will reap tomorrow, and no soul knows in what land it will die; it is God who is All Knowing and All-Aware [34] (The Quran, *Luqman*: 34)

After our Lord *the Exalted* has warned us about being deluded by the life of this world, He reminds us that after the life of this world is finished we will enter another realm: This brings the Day of Judgment and the Last Hour directly to mind. ‘Verily, with Allah alone rests the knowledge of when the Last Hour will come...’ (*Luqman*: 34) Within this verse, the Last Hour is not limited to being a reference to the Day of Judgment; quite the reverse, each one of us has a Last Hour: When someone dies the time of his reckoning always seems to immediately follow his death. Why? Indeed, the dead person can no longer perform good deeds. There is no way for him to realize the faith or good works that have passed him by. As such, at the time of death, the faith and good works he has are what he will stand before Allah with.

Earlier, we mentioned that as far as you are concerned the length of the world’s existence is equal to the amount of time you spend in it. Even if the length of time the world has actually been in existence extends from the time before Adam *peace be upon him* until the Day of Judgment, how would you benefit from the time of others?

Therefore, it is nonsensical to speak of the (*seemingly*) infinite amount of time the world has been, or even will be in existence: Remember, your time in the life of this world is short, and this is what matters. Additionally, you do not know when your days will end, nor are you able to control it: Allah has concealed the knowledge of each human being’s final moment in the same way that He has concealed the knowledge of the final moments of creation.

Indeed, the concealment of this knowledge serves a vital purpose: Allah's choice to make the time of a human being's final moment remain unknown forces the human soul to be vigilant about preparing for its occurrence at any time. This means that every passing moment could very well be your last.

This is the way it is been in every time and place: Death is ubiquitous. Of course, no one needs to be told that this is constant—extending into our time as well. Thus, each one of us should be aware and afraid of the possibility of dying in a state of disobedience. This is why the time of death has been concealed.

We also mentioned previously that those who died during the time of Adam *peace be upon him* have been in their graves from then until now. Nonetheless, when the Day of Judgment is established: 'On the Day when they behold it, [it will seem to them] as if they had tarried [in this world] no longer than one evening or [one night, ending with] its morn!' (*an-Nazi'at*: 46) Why does it appear this way? Many have pointed out the fact that time is known through the passage of events; hence, if there are not any events, there is not any time.

In support of this position, we cited the example of the People of the Cave. They remained inside the cave in which they had taken refuge for a period of 309 hundred years. In spite of this, when they began to ask one another: '...“How long have you remained thus?” [The others] answered: “We have remained thus a day or part of a day...”' (*al-Kahf*: 19).

Again, why did they figure the amount of time they had resided in the cave to be so short? Indeed, sleep insulates. That is to say, the one who is asleep can not sense what is taking place around him and is thus unable to sense the passage of time. Indeed, by an act of Allah, after this period of time had elapsed they looked at each other and none of them had aged or changed physically as a result of their long period of repose. Waking from sleep, looking upon his fellows and not noticing a significant change in their appearances, the most he could consider as having taken place is that they had been resting 'a day or part of a day.'

We observe a similar phenomenon in the story of Uzayr (Ezra), in reference to whom Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Or [are you, O man, of the same mind] as

he who passed by a town deserted by its people, with its roofs caved in, [and] said, "How could Allah bring all this back to life after its death?" Thereupon Allah caused him to be dead for a hundred years; whereafter He brought him back to life [and] said: "How long have you remained thus?" He answered: "I have remained thus a day, or part of a day..." (*al-Baqara*: 259).

He responded as such because 'a day or part of a day' is the longest amount of time a human being can sleep—under normal circumstances.

After his guess, his Lord informed him as how many years he had actually slept, saying: '...Nay, but you have remained thus for a hundred years...' (*al-Baqara*: 259). The True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to demonstrate the man's accurateness (in his estimation that he had slept 'a day or part of a day') while at the same time demonstrating His truthfulness in uncovering the reality (that the man had actually slept a hundred years). In order to satisfy both ends, Allah *Glorified is He* wisely said: '...But look at your food and your drink—untouched is it by the passing of years...' (*al-Baqara*: 259). This, of course, means that there were no visible effects of change on them. With the proof of the man's accurate judgment in concluding that he had been resting 'a day or part of a day' established, Allah goes on to say: '...look at your donkey...' (*al-Baqara*: 259). This represented proof of the True Lord's assertion: '...for a hundred years...' (*al-Baqara*: 259). Indeed, both statements were true; Allah *the Exalted* is The Constrictor and The Out spreader: He might make an amount of time seem constricted to some while making it seem outspread to others.

Refocusing our attention on the verse we are currently examining, it contains five matters which none besides Allah *the Exalted* can know with any measure of certainty: 'Verily, with Allah alone rests the knowledge of when the Last Hour will come; and He [it is who] sends down rain; and He [alone] knows what is in the wombs: whereas no one knows what he will reap tomorrow, and no one knows in what land he will die...' (*Luqman*: 34).

Does this verse cover all of the unseen matters within creation? Of course not; creation is filled with matters which we are unaware of. These must represent unseen matters which are regularly inquired about. As such, this verse must be regarded as answers to questions which are posed regularly. By

Allah, if the wind blows and carries away a few grains of sand, is there any among us who would claim to know where the sand was carried, or even in what direction? For that matter, is there any among us who knows the number of leaves which fall from a tree?

These would also classify as unseen matters which are unknown to anyone besides Allah. Speaking of ourselves, we are not even able to enumerate the blessings we are granted by Allah: ‘...and should you try to count Allah’s blessings, you could never compute them...’ (*Ibrahim*: 34).

Therefore, the five things mentioned in the verse should not be considered an exhaustive list of the unseen within creation; on the contrary, they are just a carefully selected sample of the things which are only known by Allah. To be sure, Allah *Glorified is He* has said: ‘And if all the trees on earth were pens, and the sea [were ink], with seven [more] seas yet added to it, the words of Allah would not be exhausted: for, verily, Allah *is Almighty, Wise*.’ (*Luqman*: 27)

Many of the things in creation which are now known were, at one time, only known to Allah—at which time they belonged to that innumerable category of secrets only known by Allah. Allah simply appointed a time at which they would become known. The lesson contained in this process is that we should always sense that our knowledge of that which is with Allah is inadequate. Every day we find scholars and researchers uncovering some heretofore-unknown secret concerning the creation of Allah. This is something that takes place regularly; however, the amazing thing to consider while we are in the midst of these discoveries is that we are still living the life of this world. If the secrets of the creation of Allah are being uncovered on this scale within the life of this world, what do you think will happen in the Hereafter, in paradise—if Allah wills we reach its gates?

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* has informed us about paradise; he said, ‘It contains things which no eye has witnessed, no ear has ever heard, and which has never passed the mind of any human being.’⁽¹⁾

(1) *On the authority of Abu-Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him who related the following from the Prophet peace be upon him: Allah the Exalted has said: ‘I have prepared for My righteous servants things which no eye has witnessed, no ear has heard, and which haven not even been imagined by a single human being.’ Indeed, this is confirmed by=*

The human being—perhaps by nature—accumulates information; either by witnessing with the eye or listening with the ear. Additionally, it is well known that the range of information that can be grasped with the ear is greater than that which can be grasped by the eye. Indeed, you can only see with your own two eyes, but you can learn about what others witnessed by listening to them. On top of that, you can only hear and see things which are existent.

However, there are some things which have never been conceived of by human beings; things which belong to the unseen realm and do not occur to the human mind. Perhaps this can help to explain the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘now no person knows what delights of the eye are kept hidden (in reserve) for them as a reward for their (good) deeds’ (*as-Sajda*: 17). A story has been related concerning the events that occasioned the revelation of the (five) aspects of the knowledge unknown to all except Allah that occur within the verse we are currently exploring: A man⁽¹⁾ from the tribe of Maharib who went by the name of Al-Harith ibn-‘Amr ibn Haritha⁽²⁾ made his way to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and questioned, ‘O Messenger of Allah, I want to know when the (Final) Hour will occur? Also, I have sewn my seeds; I would like to know when it will rain. My wife is pregnant, and I

= *the Book of Allah*: “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) This Hadith was narrated by Muslim in his *Sahih* (2824), Ahmad in his *Musnad* (2/466), Abu Nai’m in *al-Hilya* (2/262); the narration that was narrated by all of aforementioned collectors was the version narrated on the authority of Abu-Hurayra.

- (1) *The story of Al-Harith Ibn-‘Amr ibn-Haritha who asked the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him about doomsday.*
- (2) In reference to the events surrounding the revelation of this verse, Al-Wahidi (in his well-known book dedicated to uncovering the occurrences surrounding the revelation of various verses of the Quran) mentioned (p 198) the following: ‘The verse which states, “Verily, with Allah alone rests the knowledge of when the Last Hour will come...”’ (*Luqman* 34) was revealed in reference to Al-Harith ibn-‘Amr ibn-Haritha ibn-Maharib ibn-Hafsa, an outlander who came to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and asked him about the Hour—when it would arrive. He also mentioned that the lands on which he and his people farmed were seeded and he wanted to know when it would rain. He informed the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* that his wife was pregnant and wanted to know if she would give birth to a male or a female. Lastly, after pointing out that he knew where he was born, he asked, ‘In which land shall I die?’ Afterward, Allah *the Exalted* revealed this verse.

would like her to give birth to a male child, as I have already made preparations for his arrival, will she? What does tomorrow hold?’ Finally, he mentioned, ‘I am fully aware of the place in which I am living; however, how can I know the place of my death?’

These five questions are addressed by the verse; that is, their answers have been issued by Allah *the Exalted*: ‘Verily, with Allah alone rests the knowledge of when the Last Hour will come; and He [it is who] sends down rain; and He [alone] knows what is in the wombs: whereas no one knows what he will reap tomorrow, and no one knows in what land he will die...’ (*Luqman*: 34)

Strangely enough, we notice some people attempting to offer ‘correction’ in reference to the five things Allah identified as being His exclusive knowledge within this verse to what has been mentioned by Allah! Like those who attempt to prophesy about the occurrence of the Final Hour; all of them are liars. If they were given the good fortune of believing in Allah and knowing what He said concerning the Hour, they would not have dared to approach this issue.

We have already pointed out that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has concealed the knowledge of when the Final Hour will occur so that we can assume a constant state of readiness for it; that is, we are aware that it could arrive at any time. In fact, even those who doubt the Final Hour or even disbelieve in it are prompted to work for it because people around them are working for it and preparing to encounter its horrors. In a certain sense, this is similar to how Allah has concealed the knowledge of when each individual will die as well as the place in which she will die. Allah has made death the constant companion of His servants; indeed, the way in which different people die often seems arbitrary:

Some die only minutes after being born while some live to be a hundred years old. To be sure, the True Lord *Glorified is He* hasn’t made death the outcome of illness or anything else. There are a great many sick persons who recover and a great many persons in good health who pass away. It reminds me of how they say: ‘The one in your care who is ill; how is he doing? Indeed, the one among us in good health has passed away!’ He spoke truthfully the one who mentioned the following: Do not think of illness as the precursor to death; even if that illness be critical verily, you may witness one

who is gravely ill recover, while the one in good health may soon be enshrouded in the cloth of his burial.

The idea that death does not always result from old age has also been expressed poetically:

Death may claim a girl in the prime of youth, and spare her aging mother
One's final moment may be sluggish, but eternity in this life is not attainable

As such, we recognize that Allah has concealed the knowledge of when the Day of Judgment will arrive just as He has concealed the knowledge of when the moment of death will arrive. In light of this, our awareness of death's immanence should never waver. We should be aware that we could die at any moment and should thus act accordingly. Simply put, we expect to meet Allah; consequently, we prepare for that meeting. In fact, it must be stated definitively: When a person dies, the Day of Judgment is established in his regard. Indeed, his ability to perform good works (or bad ones for that matter) has been cut off. All of the previous examples bespeak one fundamental truth: The concealment of the knowledge of when the Day of Judgment will arrive and the concealment of the time of death expresses the essence of what these two events should mean to us. Their concealment means we should prepare for each because either could occur at any time.

Allah *the Exalted* also says: '...He [it is who] sends down rain...' (*Luqman*: 34) This also represents something which is only known by Allah. As a result of the progress of the natural sciences, some have attempted to offer predictions about the dates and times of precipitation. Using extremely precise readings about wind speed, temperature, etc. they are able to extrapolate—and be as it may—their calculations might be accurate. Nevertheless, the reality that Allah causes things that were not taken into consideration by their inquiry to occur within creation has completely eluded them. It is not uncommon for us to be surprised by a sudden change of weather or wind direction. When this occurs, all of our forecasts—and the sophisticated methods they were based upon—are 'turned on their heads.'

Indeed, when one of the most wondrous things within creation is the fact that the higher one rises in the atmosphere, although you come closer to the sun—the primary source of heat in the universe—the temperature decreases

steadily. Conversely, as you descend nearer to earth's surface, although you move farther from the sun, the temperature rises!

As such, the issue of the earth and the heavenly bodies is not one that conforms to an independently functioning 'routine.' At all times, it is the power of Allah *Glorified is He* which determines their activity. Your extrapolation should be considered a demonstration of Allah: Allah is demonstrating to you all of the factors which are included in Him effectuating certain ends within creation. Thus, you can observe the limitless scope of His power when He says to something 'Be' and it becomes as He decreed.

Indeed, in the pilgrimage we have been commanded no less than to kiss one stone adoringly and pelt another with rocks! Performing either of these actions is an expression of faith and obedience. This stone is caressed and that one is trampled under our feet. This stone is kissed and that one is thrown, why is this? Allah simply wants us to comply with what He has commanded of us. The believing soul recognizes the position of its Lord, the One Who gave life and subsequently made humanity accountable unto Him.

Continuing on to the statement of Allah *Glorified is He* '...and He [alone] knows what is in the wombs...' (*Luqman*: 34), it too, represents one of the 'keys' of the unseen we have been discussing. Regardless of how advanced the techniques of modern science become and regardless of how much people claim to know what is in the wombs, this knowledge remains the exclusive preserve of Allah. The machines (ultrasound scanning) currently in use; those that enable us to view the foetus and identify its gender seem to make this verse problematic for some. Indeed, this technological advancement has caused a stir in the souls of some men and women (who believe in the divine origin of the Quran). They have begun imagining that doctors know the contents of the womb. Consequently, they have ceased to consider this issue from among those unseen matters that are only known to Allah.

We would respond to them by saying: True, science has enabled you to know whether a foetus is male or female, while it is still in the womb, but only after it has formed, its features have become defined, and its creation has nearly been finished. The Creator *the Exalted* on the other hand knows what is 'in the womb' before the mother of the child even conceives. As a matter of

fact, Allah *the Exalted* gave His Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* glad tidings of his son Yahya (John) *peace be upon him* before he was conceived by his mother. On top of that, we have not arrived at our current knowledge of what is in the womb by tapping into some intrinsic ability that we have; on the contrary, we were taught by Allah. The doctor who informs you of the gender of the child is not, properly speaking, a knower (*'alim*) of the unseen. Quite the reverse, he has been taught something that exists with the realm of the unseen. There is nothing unusual about this; at times Allah *the Exalted* teaches certain men and women things that hitherto existed in the unseen.

What occurred in the life of, Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *may Allah be pleased with him* is an example of this phenomenon. Particularly the occasion on which he was advising his daughter 'A'isha *may Allah be pleased with her* on his deathbed, he said to her: 'O 'A'isha, it is only your two brothers and two sisters'. 'A'isha *may Allah be pleased with her* was somewhat startled by this statement as she counted her siblings as three: two brothers, Mohammad and 'Abd Ar-Rahman and one sister, Asma'. However, at the time As-Siddiq *may Allah be pleased with him* was married to Bint-Kharijah who, during her husband's final days, learned of a child that she conceived. After his death, she would eventually give birth to a girl.⁽¹⁾ Would we look upon this story and conclude that Abu Bakr knew the unseen? Of course not; it would seem more appropriate to say that he was taught an element of the unseen by Allah. Bear in mind, here, we are only ruling out the possibility of possessing an inherent means of apprehending the knowledge of the unseen.

This brings us to the present; the modern physician is able to detect the gender of the child; through the use of either ultrasound or other analytical techniques he might employ. In the strictest sense, this is not considered knowledge of the unseen. It is nothing short of disingenuous to inform a pregnant woman sitting before you: 'Allah willing, you will give birth to this or that type of child.' Normally, this does not happen.

(1) *This is a reference to Um-Kulthum bint-Abu Bakr. Her mother is Habiba bint-Kharija ibn-Zayd, she learned of her pregnancy during the final days of her husband, Abu Bakr, and eventually gave birth after his death. [Ibn-Sa'ad from At-Tabaqat 3/155].*

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘...whereas no one knows what he will reap tomorrow...’ (*Luqman*: 34). The human being is constantly toiling; either to secure benefit related to this world or related to the Hereafter. This verse touches upon the reality of the material gain you seek to acquire through work and which helps you attain a comfortable life. At the same time, this verse also deals with what you earn (or reap) in terms of your moral obligations: The human soul is either doing good actions or bad ones; performing acts of righteousness or those of evil. In all, we must remember that more than any other thing, the human being is defined by changing states.

This explains why some have been attributed the following saying to Allah: ‘O child of Adam, do not ask Me concerning your provision for tomorrow. Indeed, I do not ask you about the deeds you must perform (for My sake) tomorrow.

The statement of Allah *the Exalted* ‘...and no one knows in what land he will die...’ (*Luqman*: 34). This issue too has created some controversy because the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* informed the Ansar that he would pass away in Medina. This refers to the occasion in which he distributed the booty among all of the people with the exception of the *Ansar*. No doubt, this was something that angered them and allowed some resentment to crop up in their hearts; to them it appeared that the Prophet had prevented them from enjoying that which should have rightly been theirs. Nonetheless, the Prophet gathered them and addressed them with the aim of consoling them. He recognized their tremendous position among the ranks of the believers; he *peace and blessings be upon him* said to them: ‘By Allah, if you said that I came to you after I had been nearly exiled (from Mecca), and you accepted me, you would be telling the truth... Yet, is it not pleasing to you that people around you are returning to their living quarters with goats and camels while you are returning with the Prophet?’⁽¹⁾

(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his *Sahih* (4330); on the authority of Ibn Zayd ibn-Asim who said: When Allah *Glorified is He* granted His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* abundant spoils of war on the day of Hunayn, the Messenger used it as an opportunity to win the support of those who had hitherto been disinclined to Islam. As a result, he finished the distribution (of the spoils of war) without the Ansar having received anything. Predictably, this left them feeling excluded and left out. Recognizing this, the Messenger gathered them and addressed them thus, ‘O company of the Ansar, before I=

On a separate occasion, he *peace and blessings be upon him* was quoted as saying: 'The truly living are those who live among you and those who have died while belonging to your ranks have died worthy deaths.'⁽¹⁾

To be sure, this suggests the Prophet was told that he would die in Medina, whereas Allah *Glorified is He* said: '...whereas no one knows what he will reap tomorrow and no one knows in what land he will die...' (*Luqman*: 34). However, we would be quick to point out that the mention of 'land' here can be understood as general or specific. Medina, for instance, was the place the Prophet was informed his death would take place. Then again, where in Medina, in what 'land' in Medina, in which apartment—from among the homes of his wives? Therefore, you might know the general place; yet, the specific land in which you will expire remains unknown to anyone.

It has been related that Abu-Ja'far Al-Mansur, the Abbasid caliph was a man of liveliness and vivacity. Savouring life and loathing death, he would consult astrologers and soothsayers presumably in hope of alleviating his fear of death through learning of its time so that he could prepare for it. The story continues that Allah desired to sever the caliph's reliance on these practices so He showed the caliph a dream in which he saw a large hand with outspread

= *dwelled among you, were you not in misguidance before Allah guided you? And with my arrival, did Allah not join among you, making you a unified people after you had been warring factions? And with my arrival, were you not enriched, after you had been needy?' They responded with an acknowledgement of the blessings of Allah and the favour of His Messenger. The Prophet continued, 'What then? What has prevented you from responding to the Prophet?' Every time the Prophet would say something, they would respond with an acknowledgement of Allah's blessings and His favour upon them. 'If you wanted, you could say, "you came to us in this or that condition." Yet, does it not please you that people are returning to their homesteads with sheep and camels while you are returning to yours with the Prophet? If it was not for the fact that I migrated to Medina, I would consider myself a person from amongst the Ansar. If all of the people were traversing one valley, and the Ansar, by themselves, were traversing another valley, I would go the route of the Ansar. The Ansar are the backbone of this community the rest of the people are just its cover.'*

- (1) Narrated by Muslim in his *Sahih* (1780), Hadith # 86 in *Kitab Al-Jihad wa As-Siyar*: It is narrated (in an extended Hadith) that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said to the Ansar: 'I am Muhammad, the servant of Allah and His Messenger, I migrated unto Allah and unto you, the truly living are those who live among you and those who have died while belonging to your ranks have died worthy deaths.'

fingers emerging from the sea and extending in his direction. Upon waking, the caliph immediately summoned those skilled in dream interpretation. The ‘optimistic one among them, that is, the one seeking a handsome compensation said, ‘Each of the fingers represents a year (presumably years he had left to live).’ The others said either five months, five days, or even five minutes!

The last of those present to state his opinion was Abu-Hanifa *may Allah be pleased with him* who said to the caliph, ‘Verily, Allah desires to inform you that there are five things which are only known to Him: ‘Verily, with Allah alone rests the knowledge of the time when the Last Hour will come; and He [it is who] sends down rain; and He [alone] knows what is in the wombs: whereas no one knows what he will reap tomorrow, and no one knows in what land he will die...’ (*Luqman*: 34). In as much as this verse expresses five things which are only known to Allah, it is only fitting that the verse conclude: ‘...Verily, Allah [alone] is All Knowing, All-Aware.’ (*Luqman*: 34)

Accordingly, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to alleviate the burden of His creation: They do not need to exhaust themselves by thinking about these five issues. The important thing for us to know is that all of the precise measures upon which life rests are functioning by the power of Allah and for a wise purpose that He has dictated. Secondly, we must recognize that all of the things mentioned in the verse take place at appointed times. That is to say, even being capable of predicting when they are going to occur does nothing to advance them or postpone them. By Allah, what would it mean if you knew the precise time of your death? Certainly nothing desirable; it would only mean that you would go through life sad and dejected; unable to find the vigour to experience life fully.

This explains why Allah has concealed this issue from us: To enable us to turn toward Allah with confidence, assured that His divinely preordained will is at work among us.

the chapter of

as-Sajda

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

The chapter of *as-Sajda*⁽¹⁾:



Alif. Lam. Mim [1] (The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 1)

'*Alif. Lam. Mim*' (*as-Sajda*: 1) are from among the mysterious disjointed letters which begin several chapters of the Quran. In classical Arabic, words have a vowelizing⁽²⁾ on their last syllable which is read as long as there is a proceeding word connected to it in the same sentence; when the sentence ends, the last word is read in pausal form, that is, the final vowelizing is left silent. In contrast to the disjointed letters, the rest of the words in the Quran are written with final vowelizing which connects them from beginning to end. When we recite the Quran, we should keep reading the text with its full vowelizing for as long as our lungs allow; only when we need to take a breath should we stop, leaving the last word in pause form.

The scholars of Quranic recitation point out that there is no reason to pause between the various words, verses, or even chapters. Nevertheless, since we do eventually need to catch our breath, scholars have inserted certain

(1) The chapter of *As-Sajda*, which is the thirty-second chapter in the textual order of the Quran, is Meccan except for three Medinan verses (out of thirty verses total): 'Is, then, he who [in his earthly life] was a believer to be compared with one who was iniquitous? [Nay,] these two are not equal! [18] As for those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds – gardens of rest await them, as a welcome [from Allah], in result of what they did; [19] but as for those who are lost in iniquity – their goal is the fire... [20]' (*as-Sajda*:18-20) the chapter of *As-Sajda* was revealed after the chapter of *Al-Mu'minun* and before the chapter of *at-Tur*.

(2) A Vowelizing adds on the sound of an Arabic Vowel to a word, indicating that once you have read this word it will flow into the next word within the sentence continuously until a pausal indicator is met. Then the word will be read without the Vowelizing indicating a pause or a stop to the sentence.

symbols to indicate the points where it would be preferable to stop. But again, the overarching rule is to read the Quran continuously without any breaks between the various passages.

The clearest indication for this rule is the fact that the word *an-nas* (people), which is the last word of the last [eponymous] chapter, is fully voweled (again, normally, we would read the final word of any section in the pause form). After having us dwell on the word (*an-nas*), Allah then has us seamlessly journey on in our recitation to the opening invocation of the first chapter – ‘In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, and the Dispenser of Mercy.’ (*al-Fatiha*: 1) The point is that we should not artificially disconnect the end of the scripture from its beginning. In this vein, those who recite the Quran are known as ‘the travelling residents’ because no sooner have they ‘dwelled’ on one passage than they are already ‘moving on’ to the next, continuously, without linear end.

Given that the five keys to the Great Beyond are mentioned immediately before at the end of the previous chapter of *Luqman*, it could be argued that these three enigmatic letters ‘*Alif. Lam. Mim.*’ (*as-Sajda*: 1) are connected to them. These letters are a mystery whose secret Allah has concealed in His knowledge. Hence our interpretations can only begin to approach their true meanings. Accordingly, we must always append our interpretations with the disclaimer that ‘And Allah knows best as to the intended meaning,’ in contrast to the rest of the verses in the Quran whose meanings are more straightforward.

Just imagine: one day we will recline on the seat of truth in the presence of the Sovereign who determines all things, listening to the Quran directly from Allah *the Exalted* Himself. Undoubtedly, our ears will catch many things they did not hear before, and we will be able to discern manifold layers of meaning which we had previously failed to uncover. Then – and only then – will we know the full meanings behind the disjointed letters of the Quran; it will become fully clear to us how far our intellects were from fully comprehending them, how utterly thick-skulled we were when it came to understanding what Allah was trying to get across.

The three letters ‘*Alif. Lam. Mim.*’ (*as-Sajda*: 1) are usually proceeded in the Quran by a mention of the Holy Scripture, as in this chapter:

تَنْزِيلُ الْكِتَابِ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ مِنْ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٢﴾

**This scripture, free from all doubt, has been
sent down from the Lord of the Worlds [2]
(The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 2)**

The root word meaning ‘to be revealed’ (*n-z-l*) appears in the Quran in three different forms: *nazala* (to be revealed) and *nazzala* and *anzala* (to reveal). *Anzala* is transitive, meaning that Allah Himself *Glorified is He* is the agent who had the Quran transported from the Imperishable Tablet to the lowest heaven, from where it waited until it was brought down to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* in accordance with its mission.

The verb *nazzala* has the same meaning as *anzala*, but it is used when referring to the angels as the agents of revelation. Thus, in (*al-Qadr*: 1), the Quran uses the form *anzala* ‘Behold, from on high have We bestowed this (*anzalna-hu*) [Book] on the Night of Destiny’ (*al-Qadr*: 1) to stress the agency of Allah in carrying the Quran from the Imperishable Tablet to the lowest heaven. And from the lowest heaven, the angels brought the scripture down piecemeal as required by the events unfolding among the nascent Muslim community; as the Quran notes: ‘The Faithful Spirit has alighted with it (*nazala bihi*) from on high’. (*ash-Shu‘ara*: 193)

‘And as a guide towards the truth have We bestowed this [revelation] from on high (*anzalna-hu*); with this [very] truth has it come down (*nazala*) [unto you, O Prophet]...’ (*al-Isra*: 105) this book had been preserved with Allah on the Imperishable Tablet ‘which none but the pure can touch’ (*al-Waqi‘a*: 79) whence Gabriel, that Faithful Spirit, then transported it to our earthly abode.

‘[T]he Faithful Spirit has alighted with it (*nazala bihi*) from on high’ (*ash-Shu‘ara*: 193) meaning that the Quran came down with Gabriel; this corresponds exactly to ‘And as a guide towards the truth have We bestowed this [revelation] from on high (*anzalna-hu*); with this [very] truth has it come down (*nazala*) [unto you, O Prophet]...’ (*al-Isra*: 105). The difference is that in one, the process of revelation is attributed [intransitively] to the Quran itself, and in the other [transitively] to the Faithful Spirit.

All the derivatives of the root (*n-z-l*) indicate movement from one entity who is higher to another who is lower. And if you take your orders from a higher authority, you should never look anywhere else for direction.

This is why, when Allah *the Exalted* addresses the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* He says, ‘Say: “Come (*ta‘alaw*), let me convey unto you what Allah has [really] forbidden to you...”’ (*al-An‘am*: 151). The word *ta‘alaw* can mean ‘come!’ (as translated above), but it also has buried in it the meaning of ‘loftiness, sublimity’ (*‘uhww*), thus providing the more nuanced interpretation of ‘come from what is lowly to what is lofty!’ or ‘leave your worldly condition and draw nigh to the sublimity of your Lord in the Heavenly Host!’

This means that we should not take our direction from ourselves or from our fellow mortals, but that we should rise up from our finite world and our finite intellects and take from the One Who has laid out the Way for us; for His prescriptions are inevitably safer and surer for us. His knowledge is all Encompassing; He will not tell us to do one thing one day and then the opposite the next.

Furthermore, not only is Allah’s law the truth, but it embraces all aspects of our life. Allah is more merciful to us than the mother toward her child; He would never decree any law for us unless it was in our own interest. After all, unlike us humans who invariably craft laws with our own individual self-interests in mind, Allah *Glorified is He* does not have any selfish ulterior motives that could taint the justice of His code.

Whenever the capitalist oligarchs, for instance, promulgate a new law, they formulate it in such a way that makes them the foremost beneficiaries of it. But it is precisely because of this unhealthy partiality that the whole political system soon enough collapses in on itself. Since a true lawgiver may never champion laws that serve their own self-interests, it follows that only Allah Almighty deserves the appellation ‘lawgiver’ in the proper sense of the word. This is why the rejecters of truth and the idolaters inevitably seek out the answers to life’s hardships from Islamic law, after their own laws fail them.

One time, when I was in San Francisco, someone asked me about the two verses ‘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 other religions – however hateful this may be to those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Allah” (*at-Tawba*: 33) and ‘They aim to extinguish Allah’s light with their utterances: but Allah has willed to spread His light in all its fullness, however hateful this may be to all who deny the truth.’ (*as-Saff*: 8) Someone posed the question, ‘If this verse is saying that Islam was supposed to have prevailed over all other religions fourteen hundred years ago, why is it that most people today are non-Muslim?’ My response was that if they truly understood the nuances of the Arabic language and truly pondered the meaning of this verse, they would find the answer to their question. Note how the verses end with ‘although they who associate others with Allah dislike’ (*as-Saff*: 8) and, ‘however hateful this to the disbelievers.’ (*at-Tawba*: 33)

The implication of this is that disbelief and polytheism did in fact coexist with Islam. The word ‘prevail’ here does not mean that non-Muslims will be wiped off the face of the earth but that, rather, Islam will ‘prevail’ in the sense that everyone will find themselves forced by life’s circumstances to seek recourse in its legal injunctions even though they may not believe in Islam’s ultimate truth. Indeed, the fact that non-Muslims are flummoxed to find any solution to their problems except in the Quran is the most demonstrative proof of the religion’s ‘prevail’ imaginable.

The best example of this is how the Christians used to attack Islam for permitting divorce and polygamy, accusing Muslims of being uncivilized, bestial even. But in the end, the exigencies of life forced the Christians to legalize divorce, which the Vatican did not even bother trying to intervene to stop. But did they come around and start believing in Islam? No; the realities of the world merely compelled them to accept the wisdom of Islamic law because it alone had the answer to their problems.

This, then, is the testimony of Allah’s enemies to the wholesomeness of His religion; this is the greatest proof of Islam’s supremacy over all other religions. If these Christians had embraced the faith, people would dismiss their adoption of Islamic law simply because of their religious allegiance, but the fact is that they borrowed from our legal code even while rejecting its divine provenance.

‘Beyond any doubt’ As we discussed before, things can be described with varying degrees of certitude on a scale between what is definitively established and what has not been definitively established. For instance, the roundness of the earth is a definitively established fact which can be proven through physical evidence.

Issues which have not been definitively established fall under one of three categories: doubt, assumption, or conjecture. ‘Doubt’ means to have equal perception of something as true or false; ‘assumption’ is to adjudge something more likely true than not; and ‘conjecture’ is to tend toward believing something even though it is likely not true.

‘Beyond any doubt’ Again, given that ‘doubt’ refers to the equal likelihood of something being true or untrue, the categorical negation of even the (possibility) that this could be untrue is an affirmation of its veracity in the highest degree.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* proceeds in this chapter with:

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَاهُ بَلْ هُوَ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ لِتُنْذِرَ قَوْمًا مَّا
 أَتَاهُمْ مِّنْ نَّذِيرٍ مِّن قَبْلِكَ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَهْتَدُونَ ﴿٣﴾

Yet they say, ‘Muhammad has made it up.’ No indeed! It is the Truth from your Lord for you [Prophet], to warn a people who have had no one to warn them before, so that they may be guided [3] (The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 3)

It is rather inexplicable that the Arabs would react to Allah’s Word with these slanderous accusations, given that they were renowned for their eloquence and their rhetoric. Again, given this preoccupation with the nuances of their language’s beauty, it is rather inexplicable that the Arab idolaters simply refused to concede any difference between the speech of their fellow mortals and the speech of the Omniscient Allah, particularly given how the Quran openly challenged them to produce one verse similar to the Quran’s verses. Keeping in mind that the weak are never challenged in such a manner, the Quran is implicitly recognizing the Arabs’ stature and their prowess in the linguistic arts. Even though they were inevitably bound to

fail this test, it was enough of an honour for Allah to have even bothered with them in the first place.

Given their utter inability to produce anything similar to the majestic Quran, the idolaters began to accuse the Prophet of being nothing more than a poet, a magician, insane, or of having took his Quran from a non-Arab, and so on. But this served nothing other than to demonstrate the utter invalidity of their arguments. They tried to call the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* a liar even though it was crystal-clear to them that the Quran could not have sprung from a mortal mind, as conceded by Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira, for instance, ‘By Allah, [the Quran is like a fertile tree] its uppermost [branches] bristle with fruits, while its lower [branches] overflow in oceanic abundance. It towers high, shadowed by nothing.’

The idolaters’ failure to find anything to criticize in the Quran was effectively an implicit recognition of its divine origin. Accordingly, they started to complain, not about the veracity of the Book, but about the fact that it was revealed specifically to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This indicates how the rejectionists of truth themselves concluded that the Quran is miraculously inimitable, and that it is unquestionably from Allah. Nevertheless, despite having become convinced of the Quran’s truthfulness, the rejectionists of truth impudently prayed: ‘And [remember] when they said, “O Allah, if this should be the truth from You, then rain down upon us stones from the sky or bring us a painful punishment.”’ (*al-Anfal*: 32)

Given that no one in their right senses would ever say such a thing, this only demonstrates their utter and complete foolishness. What they should have said is, ‘O Allah! If this should be the truth from You, (then guide us to it)!’

The Quran refuted all of their lies against the Prophet. When they claimed that the Prophet was possessed, Allah refuted them, ‘Nun (the Arabic letter 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 are of a great moral character.’ (*al-Qalam*: 1-4)

The clinically insane are never known for their strong morality because they are helplessly dominated by their instincts, unable to control their

behaviour, just like an animal. Under these circumstances, how could they ever become paragons of virtue?

By contrast, those in control of their mental faculties have the ability to freely choose what course of action they want to take. If someone transgresses against them, they might respond in kind or – contemplating that such a response might only cause more violence against them – they might opt instead to exercise forbearance. Some might suppress their anger, while others might completely wipe out whatever anger is in their hearts, seeking Allah's reward instead, as per the verse⁽¹⁾, 'Would you not like that Allah should forgive you?' (*an-Nur*: 22) where Allah exhorts us to perform good deeds

Once, Al-Hasan Al-Basri was asked, 'How can Allah possibly expect us to practice goodness toward those who would transgress against us?' He said, 'There are varying degrees of virtue. While Allah has allowed us to respond to evil similarly: 'And the recompense of evil is evil the like of it.' (*ash-Shura*: 40) He has also left open the door of perseverance for the magnanimous believers: 'but whoever pardons and makes reconciliation – his reward is [due] from Allah.' (*ash-Shura*: 40)

This sort of forbearance may seem unwarranted, but let us analyse this issue rationally: all of creation are Allah's dependents and they are all equal before Him. If one of your dependents were to transgress against another, there is no doubt that you would take the side of the wronged party, hold them in your arms, and cuddle them. Similarly, the True Lord *Glorified is He* takes the side of His servants whenever they are wronged. The oppressed believers should be good to their tormentors who have unwittingly placed them on Allah's side.

(1) *This verse (aya) was revealed regarding Abu Bakr As-Siddiq may Allah be pleased with him when he vowed never again to provide any sort of assistance to Mastah ibn Uthatha who had slandered 'A'isha. When Allah proclaimed her innocence, He then ordered Abu Bakr may Allah be pleased with him to show mercy on his nephew who had absolutely nothing except what Abu Bakr gave him, and who was duly punished for his sin. When Allah Glorified is He revealed, "Would you not like that Allah should forgive you?" (an-Nur: 22), Abu Bakr may Allah be pleased with him responded: of course, Allah, I want You to forgive me my sins, at which point he resumed his stipend for Mastah. [(Ibn Kathir's Quranic Exegesis) (Tafsir Ibn Kathir) 276/3]*

Given this, some people say that you gain divine rewards not from accompanying the righteous people, but from spending time with the wicked whose injuries you are forced to bear with benevolence. This is also the logic behind the saying that ‘He may be a good guy, but spending time with him does not bring any heavenly reward because he is too darn helpful and humble.’

It has been narrated that once, our Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sitting among his companions, he [suddenly] smiled. The companions asked him what the reason was, so he said, ‘I had a vision where I saw my Lord with two litigants seated before Him. The accuser declared, ‘Lord, this person has wronged me, so I ask You to take my due from him’ to which Allah responded, ‘How am I supposed to do that?’ The man answered, ‘Give me from his good deeds the equivalent of the injury he has wrought on me.’ ‘But,’ Allah pointed out, ‘he does not have any good deeds to begin with!’ ‘In that case, take my sins and give them to him!’ Allah responded, ‘Would you not prefer not to have any sins at all?’ ‘In that case, Lord, how am I supposed to take my due from him?’ ‘Look to your right.’ When the man looked to his right, he saw chateaus and gardens, replete with wonders which no eye has ever beheld, no ear has ever heard, and which no human heart has ever even conceived. ‘To whom does this belong, Lord?’ Allah *Glorified is He* answered, ‘To those prepared to pay the proper price.’ ‘And what, Lord, is the right price?’ ‘To take your brother’s hand and enter Heaven together.’ The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* concluded, saying, ‘I smiled because I was in utter awe of a Lord who would do this to make things right between His servants.’⁽¹⁾

This is the response to the charge that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was crazy or possessed. With regards to the accusation that he was some sort of magician, the refutation is easy enough: If Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had bewitched certain people into becoming his followers,

(1) Cited by Al-Hakim in the (Addendum to the Authentic Narrations of Al-Bukhari and Muslim) (Mustadrak) (576/4) who noted that, ‘The chain of narrations is authentic even if Al-Bukhari and Muslim did not include it.’ Adh-Dhahabi on the other hand stated that, ‘‘Abbad is weak on top of which his teacher is not known to us.’ Abu Bakr ibn Abu Dawud As-Sijistani quoted this Hadith as well in (The Resurrection) (Al-Ba‘th wa-An-Nushur) (p49-50) also from the Hadith of Anas ibn Malik may Allah be pleased with him.

why was not he able to bewitch you as well? The fact that you are free from the influence of any magic is proof enough that he was nothing of the kind, and that this is nothing more than a libellous slander.

As for the charge that Muhammad was nothing more than a poet who made up the Quran, this is also a rather perplexing thing for the Arabs to say given that they were renowned for their fantastic eloquence. They, more than anyone else, could appreciate the difference between poetry and prose, having refined perhaps more diverse forms of literary presentation than any other culture. Allah took it upon Himself to respond to this accusation: 'And We did not give Prophet Muhammad, knowledge of poetry.' (*Ya Sin*: 69) Similarly, in the chapter of *al-Haqqa*, He *Glorified is He* declares that: 'And it is not the word of a poet; little do you believe. Nor the word of a soothsayer; little do you remember.' (*al-Haqqa*: 41-42)

All their ruses having been foiled, and all their slanderous lies having been proven false, the rejectionists of truth then asserted that the Prophet had the Quran dictated to him by a jinn – a common assumption, actually, of poets who displayed a flawless command of the language. It was also widely accepted among the Arabs that these jinn-muses resided in a valley called 'Abqar.

Classical Arabic poetry is characterized by a strict adherence to a traditional rhyming scheme within one of the sixteen established metrical forms, a format to which the Quran definitely does not conform. Thus, the claim that the Quran was somehow nothing more than a generic Arabic poem was as blatantly false as the claim that it was nothing more than the product of Muhammad's imagination. 'Or do they say, "He invented it"? Rather, it is the truth from your Lord' (*as-Sajda*: 3). Do they concede that this Book is from the Lord of the universe and that its truth is beyond all doubt? Or are they saying that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* invented it? The 'or' is meant to negate the previous statement. 'Rather, it is the truth from your Lord.' The word 'rather' has the force of negating the preceding claim that 'he invented it.' Thus, when the idolaters claim that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* just made up the Holy Scripture, Allah *Glorified is He* rebutted the claim with, 'it is the truth from your Lord,' since their accusations are utterly baseless.

As we have discussed before, the truth is by definition immutable and unchanging. Similarly, facts are facts, and cannot change from one moment to the next. For instance, suppose a car accident happens; we have a plaintiff, a defendant, and some witnesses, all of whom are brought before the judge. Although the plaintiff or the defendant might change their testimony, or some of the witnesses may lie under oath, the seasoned judge's training and experience will enable him to uncover the facts and to sort out the conflicting testimonies to determine who is telling the truth. The judge will piece together the truth because there was only one incident with one set of complementary facts. Through subtle wit, the judge can expose the contradictory false claims and weigh in on the side of truth which is free of contradictions.

In this vein, there was once a judge who tricked two litigants into admitting the truth. The plaintiff charged that the defendant had failed to return money which the latter had borrowed from him, while the defendant for his part claimed that he had in fact repaid the loan at an exact place and time which he specified. The judge then ordered the defendant to return to the place where he allegedly repaid the money to check whether the money had perhaps fallen out of his pocket. The man went off, while the judge and the plaintiff stayed behind, waiting. The minutes kept going by until they started stretching into hours. The judge turned to the plaintiff and said, 'Your friend is sure taking his sweet time,' prompting the latter to remark offhand that, 'Probably because the place is so far away.' And thus was the judge able to trick the mendacious litigant into unwittingly saying the truth.

The phrase 'That you may warn a people to whom no warner has come before you [so]' (*as-Sajda*: 3) means that although it is well-known that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came as both a bringer of glad tidings and as a warner; his role as warner is singled out here to stress his mission to rectify people's corrupted beliefs. Allah's goodly reward is not mentioned in this context, even though it usually precedes the admonishment of Hell, since the disbelievers' refusal to avail themselves of the latter disqualified them from Heaven in any case.

The phrase 'a people to whom no warner has come before you [so]' seems to be at odds with other verses in the Quran such as 'And there was no

nation but that there had passed within it a warner.’ (*Fatir*: 24) and ‘never would We punish until We sent a messenger.’ (*al-Isra’*: 15) But there really is no contradiction here, since the former verse simply means that no warner has come to them recently. It is also perfectly conceivable that one came to them at some more distant point in the past, as alluded to in the chapter of *al-Ma’ida*: ‘O People of the Scripture, there has come to you Our Messenger to make clear to you [the religion] after a period [of suspension] of messengers.’ (*al-Ma’ida*: 19) Otherwise, how can we explain the fact that the pre-Islamic Arabs recognized Allah as the creator of the universe: ‘And if you asked them, “Who created the heavens and earth?” they would surely say, “Allah”. Say, “[All] praise is [due] to Allah.”’ (*Luqman*: 25) This can only have come from the teachings passed down from the ancient prophets, an idea which is further reinforced by the fact that some of the pre-Islamic Arabs known as *hunafa’* followed the true religion, whereby they shunned all idol worshipping and strove to live according to their primordial nature, untainted by sin.

‘Perhaps they will be guided.’ (*as-Sajda*: 3) The word ‘perhaps’ indicates hope; and when Allah employs this word, it is certain that this hope will become a reality. Allah *Glorified is He* wants all of His servants to join the faith so that He can lavish them with the wonderful rewards of Heaven just as He has lavished them with His blessings here on earth since they are all without exception His creatures. We mentioned earlier the Qudsi Hadith which states ‘Leave those I have created to Me; if they repent to Me, I am their beloved, and even if they do not, I am still their doctor who cures them of their sins’.⁽¹⁾

The True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks in the following verse on the origin of the universe:

(1) Cited by Al-Ghazali in his (*Ihya’ ‘Ulum Al-Din*) (52/4) from some of the early Muslims: “Every time a servant sins, the piece of earth beneath them asks Allah to allow it to swallow them up, while the piece of sky above them asks Allah to allow it to fall down on them. But Allah *Glorified is He* says to both the heavens and the earth, ‘Restrain from injuring My servant; if you had created them, you too would have shown mercy on them. Perhaps they will repent to Me and have their sins forgiven, and start doing righteous deeds in lieu of their sins so that they can be rewarded accordingly.”

اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ
عَلَى الْعَرْشِ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ وَلِيٍّ وَلَا شَفِيعٍ أَفَلَا تَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٤﴾

It is God who created the heavens and the earth and everything between them in six Days. Then He established Himself on the Throne. You [people] have no one but Him to protect you and no one to intercede for you, so why do you not take heed? [4] (The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 4)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* is telling us here that He has created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them for our benefit. We humans are honoured above everything else; all the other creatures – the animals, plants, and even inanimate objects – stand at our service. We are veritable masters in this universe although we need to appreciate that we did not gain this mastery because we possess some inherent greatness, but rather because of Allah's grace. Before all else, we should express our gratitude to the One Who has granted us such a distinguished station in the hierarchy of creation.

On top of which this supposed 'master of the world' lives for no more than a fleeting moment; no matter how long our life span stretches out, it will eventually be cut off by death. We should really ponder the fact that the length of our life span pales in comparison with the life span of the lowly inanimate objects around us.

The only explanation which could possibly resolve this perplexing discrepancy is that there is another, more enduring life where our life span is indefinitely extended to more perfectly match the supreme honour with which Allah has crowned us. In the Hereafter, all these other creatures will vanish into the tides of time, whereas we shall live on. We will no longer need them because our immediate proximity to the First Cause *Glorified is He* will have rendered the physical laws of cause and effect obsolete; we will spontaneously find everything which we could desire before us without any effort on our part. But this honour will belong exclusively to those who obey the Giver Who raises His servants by degrees.

Accordingly, the True Lord *Glorified is He* draws our attention to the fact that while we humans may be the masters of the universe with every other

creature standing at our service, the grandeur of the cosmos is greater than the creation of the human being: 'The creation of the heavens and earth is greater than the creation of mankind.' (*Ghafir*: 57) This is because we have a very limited life span which, no matter how long it may stretch out, will inevitably expire. Furthermore, our life span does not come with any guarantees: the wealthy is liable to go bankrupt; the healthy is liable to fall cripplingly ill, while the strong is liable to become debilitated. The celestial bodies, on the other hand, which are not prone to such vicissitudes, never weaken or die. And in any case, we cannot even begin to approach their grandeur; for, while we may be able to affect ourselves, and our immediate environment, the stars affect the destiny of literally entire galaxies.

The fact that even the rejectionists of truth concede that Allah is the originator of the heavens and the earth is indeed one of the fundamental proofs for His existence.

The creation of the cosmos is one of the mysteries Allah has concealed in His infinite knowledge. No one can definitively say how they or the human race was created, since none of us have personally witnessed this event. Allah says: 'I did not make them witness to the creation of the heavens and the earth or to the creation of themselves, and I would not have taken the misguiders as assistants.' (*al-Kahf*: 51) These misguiders constantly try to herd us off the path of truth and onto the path of falsehood with their all-too-familiar fabrications regarding the origins of the universe

The point is that the truth of how the cosmos came about should only be taken from the One Who created it as stated by the Quran. Creation is a process, an action, and any given action presupposes a certain quantity of time wherein the events concerned are able to unfold. Hence, a dilemma arises from this phrase 'in six days,' (*as-Sajda*: 4) which is: does Allah *Glorified is He* need time in order to execute an action?

Whenever we mortals try to do something, we need to operate within the framework of the fourth dimension – i.e., time – whereby each division of our action is carried out within a certain subdivision of time. Allah, on the other hand, operates outside the constraints of our space-time continuum and simply declares something 'Be!' for it to immediately come into existence. Let

us provide an example to illustrate ‘in six days’ – keeping in mind, of course, that to Allah belong the loftiest of parables!

When you want to make yoghurt, you first mix together some yeast and milk, and then cook it for seven or eight hours. Now, did it actually take you seven or eight hours to make this yoghurt? No, it just took you the few minutes to prepare the mix, after which the ingredients themselves reacted with one another until they transformed into a new substance.

Similarly, the True Lord *Glorified is He* created the elements of the cosmos through His command, after which they interacted with one another to fashion the heavens and the earth as we now know them.

This topic is taken up in seven different chapters, three of which (*al-Furqan*, *as-Sajda*, *Qaf*) mention the creation of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them⁽¹⁾, the other four (*al-A'raf*, *Yunus*, *Hud*, *al-Hadid*) mention only the heavens and the earth⁽²⁾.

The heavens and the earth were created as an envelope, and only after this initial creation were the contents poured in – which is, after all, the logical order.

Remember that Allah is immediately addressing the ancient Arabs for whom a ‘day’ was defined by the movement of the sun and the moon. But how could there be any ‘days’ if neither sun nor moon had existed up to this point? It could mean that Allah created the universe in a period of time equivalent to one-hundred forty-four hours; otherwise, we could understand ‘day’ as being an exponentially more expansive measure of time, given that the

(1) ‘He who has created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in six days’. (*al-Furqan*: 59)

– ‘It is Allah who has created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in six days’ (*as-Sajda*: 4) – ‘And [who knows that] We have indeed created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in six days.’ (*Qaf*: 38)

(2) ‘Verily, your Sustainer is Allah, who has created the heavens and the earth in six days.’ (*al-A'raf*: 54)

– ‘Verily, your Sustainer is Allah, who has created the heavens and the earth in six days.’ (*Yunus*: 3)

– ‘And it is He who has created the heavens and the earth in six days.’ (*Hud*: 7)

– ‘It is He who has created the heavens and the earth in six days.’ (*al-Hadid*: 4)

passage of time is different for Allah, as the Quran makes clear 'And indeed, a day with your Lord is like a thousand years of those which you count.' (*al-Hajj*: 47)

Similarly, in reference to the Hereafter, the Quran says, 'The angels and the Spirit will ascend to Him during a Day the extent of which is fifty thousand years.' (*al-Ma'arij*: 4)

Allah *Glorified is He* has one measure for a 'day' in this world and another for the Hereafter.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* only delves into this issue in any detail in the chapter of *Fussilat*: 'Say, "Do you indeed disbelieve in He who created the earth in two days and attribute to Him equals? That is the Lord of the worlds." And He placed on the earth firmly set mountains over its surface, and He blessed it and determined therein its [creatures'] sustenance in four days without distinction – for [the information] of those who ask.'" (*Fussilat*: 9-10) Two days plus four days equals six days.

'Then He rose over towards the heaven when it was smoke, and said to it and to the earth: "Come both of you willingly or unwillingly." They both said: "We come, willingly. And He completed them as seven heavens within two days.'" (*Fussilat*: 11-12) And with these two more days we now have a total of eight.

A question arises here: how are we supposed to reconcile between the more general verses which state that Allah created everything in six days and with this more detailed verse which claims that He did so in eight? The answer is that we should use the more general verses as the reference point to understand the more detailed verses. This is so since the subsets of days in the latter could be counted either separately, or as having occurred contemporaneously, whereas the former is final and unambiguous.

Let us count the number of days together: 'Do you indeed disbelieve in He who created the earth in two days and attribute to Him equals? That is the Lord of the worlds. And He placed on the earth firmly set mountains over its surface, and He blessed it and determined therein its [creatures'] sustenance,' these are the fixtures of the earth – 'in four days.' The point is that the time

for the creation of these fixtures should be subsumed under the time for the creation of the earth as a whole, which is mentioned in the first verse.

This all happened in four days; the first two days being included in the total four, It is like when you say, ‘It took me an hour to get from Cairo to Tanta, and two to get to Alexandria,’ meaning that it took you two hours total to go from Cairo to Tanta to Alexandria, the first hour being included in the total.

Since the adornment of the earth was merely the completion of its overall creation and not a separate event per se, so too should the time period of four days be seen as embracing both the initial and secondary creation. Thus, the sum total is six days, there being no contradiction with the other verses quoted above. ‘If it had been from [any] other than Allah, they would have found within it much contradiction.’ (*an-Nisa*: 82) On a side note, it is rather interesting that this issue would be treated in detail in a chapter whose name literally means ‘Treated in Detail.’

Allah *Glorified is He* then says, ‘and then He rose over the Throne,’ or, more literally, He seated Himself upon the throne. We need to keep in mind that the True Lord *Glorified is He* addresses us with language meant to drive home for us deep metaphysical truths. In this instance, He uses the image of a monarch who can mount their throne only after their kingdom has been set in order.

The word for ‘seated’ *istawa* means to rise up, sit, and then settle in, all of these meanings being applicable to the verse, with the proviso of course that ‘There is nothing like unto Him.’ (*ash-Shura*: 11)

Just as Allah possesses an existence that is qualitatively different from our existence, and just as He performs actions fundamentally different from our actions, so too does He ‘seat’ Himself in a manner that is categorically different from how we sit. Thus, for instance, if there is a state function with various officials of different ranks – mayors, governors, and the president himself – of course each person would hold a certain seat and posture themselves in a certain manner as appropriate to their rank. So if we humans have different protocols for how various ranks of people seat themselves, how can we assume that the way that Allah *Glorified is He* establishes His authority could in any way be similar to our own?

‘You have not besides Him any protector or any intercessor.’ A ‘protector’ is someone close to you who you can seek refuge in, while an ‘intercessor’ is someone who tries to use his connections to help you out. In other words, a protector is someone who can himself succour you, while an intercessor is someone who tries to influence those who have direct authority over you. Either way, you have no protector or intercessor outside of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Hence the verse ‘And when adversity touches you at sea, lost are [all] those you invoke except for Him.’ (*al-Isra*: 67) means that no one can rescue you except Allah, ‘so will you not be reminded?’ (*as-Sajda*: 4) This issue should constantly be on our minds since we live in a protean world whose vicissitudes we are constantly subject to. We are perpetually swinging between the scales of wealth and poverty, health and illness, strength and weakness.

Accordingly, if we always keep in mind that we have no protector or advocate save Allah, our hearts will find rest; and how could we not feel secure knowing that Allah would never fail us for even a second? Once this conviction becomes entrenched in our hearts, we can plunge into life with unmitigated audacity; if we plunge into life with no a holds-bar attitude, it will never be able to suck our strength away from us.

Those who are too timid to take life by the horns are like the father who, fearing he might die, abandons his children to prevent them from having to endure the pain of possibly becoming orphans. Instead, he should have realized that he is not the one who created them and that, should anything happen to him, their true Creator will take care of them and will provide them with parents from the community of believers if need be. If we really understood this point, we would not worry about what will happen to our children. As the poet once sang, ‘through orphanhood have you soared to the threshold of perfection?’ Or as another poet once said,

Thus said one blessed with a mother and father: ‘If only I were parentless’.

This wish may sound utterly bizarre, but the fact is that Islam provides for orphans to be better taken care of than children with biological parents.

The point is that knowing Allah has our back gives us the strength to confront life’s challenges with conviction and certainty. When we are in our

hour of urgent need, when everyone has abandoned us and the whole world is failing us, all of us – even the rejectionists of truth – cry out the Lord’s name, whether voluntarily or otherwise.

The word ‘except in ‘except for Him’ means that there is no one else; any human being or other creature who helps you only does so because Allah has inspired them to have compassion towards you. All goodness ultimately has Allah as its source.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

يُدَبِّرُ الْأَمْرَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ ثُمَّ يَعْرُجُ إِلَيْهِ فِي يَوْمٍ
كَانَ مِقْدَارُهُ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ مِّمَّا تَعُدُّونَ

**He runs everything, from the heavens to the earth, and
everything will ascend to Him in the end, on a Day that
will measure a thousand years in your reckoning [5]**

(The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 5)

This verse rebuts the philosophers who claim that Allah *Glorified is He* created the universe, set up the laws of nature, and then left everything to run by itself like a wound-up clock. But as this verse notes, ‘He arranges [each] matter’ He is actively sustaining existence at all times.

Otherwise, how could we reconcile the philosophers’ claims with the fact that ‘Neither slumber overtakes Him, nor sleep.’ (*al-Baqara*: 255)? The truth is that, not only did Allah *Glorified is He* initiate the creation of the universe, but also He has never ceased managing even its most minute affairs. We know this because, while He has established physical laws which are constant, He sometimes bends these laws; He suspended the law of burning for Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and the law of liquidity for Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. This definitively demonstrates that the order of creation is constantly upheld by Allah *Glorified is He*.

If the philosophers were right, the universe would be nothing more than a mechanical alarm clock set ahead of time to later go off by itself. If this had been the case, the fire would have simply extinguished when Abraham *peace be upon him* was hurled into it.

Regarding the verse ‘every day He is bringing about a matter’ (*ar-Rahman*: 29), a wise man was once asked, ‘What affair could the Lord possibly be engaged in now that the pen of destiny has dried?’ He replied that it does not mean that Allah creates from scratch any longer, merely that He manifests latent realities to raise up some people and lower others.⁽¹⁾

The point is that the ongoing process of creation is merely the manifestation of what already exists – not creation out of nothing. All future events have already been created, and are merely awaiting Allah’s word to be brought to light.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* ‘He arranges [each] matter from the heaven to the earth’ (*as-Sajda*: 5) after which the results are brought back to Him: ‘then it will ascend to Him in a Day.’ (*as-Sajda*: 5) Just as Allah *Glorified is He* sends the angels down to earth, so too does He recall them, with each angel carrying out a special task. What Allah is doing, in other words, is follow-up, like a manager who follows up with his employees to evaluate them and reward them according to what they have earned.

It is the angels who bring back the results of Allah’s Commands: ‘the extent of which is a thousand years of those which you count.’ (*as-Sajda*: 5) The stride of the angels is not like our stride; the distance which would take us a millennium to traverse, the angels can cross in a single day.

This disparity between the ability of different creatures to traverse space and time is also alluded to in the story of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* where he says, ‘O assembly [of jinn], which of you will bring me her throne before they come to me in submission?’ (*an-Naml*: 38) Out of the mixed group of humans and jinn Sulaiman *peace be upon him* was addressing, none of the humans offered to take up the challenge; the only person to step forward was (a) ‘*ifrit* which is not an ordinary jinni, but a jinn with above-average

(1) Abu Ad-Darda’ *may Allah be pleased with him* narrated that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said regarding the verse, “every day He is bringing about a matter” “Allah busies Himself – among other things – with forgiving people’s sins, relieving their anguish, raising up some people, and lowering others.” In (Ad-Durr Al-Manthur) (699/7), As-Suyuti noted that “This is related by Al-Hasan ibn Sufyan in his Al-Musnad as well as Al-Bazzar, Ibn Jarir, At-Tabarani, Abu Ash-Sheikh in his (Al-‘Azma), Ibn Mardawayh, Al-Bayhaqi in his Shu‘ab Al-Iman and Ibn ‘Asakar.’

capabilities. Because like humans, there are both jinn who are capable and on top of things, and then there are jinn who are bumbling incompetents.

So this *‘ifrit* said to Sulaiman *peace be upon him* ‘I will bring it to you before you rise from your place’ (*an-Naml*: 39) meaning that he could do it, but that he would need perhaps an hour or two. But one who was enlightened with the wisdom of revelation suddenly spoke up, ‘I will bring it to you before your glance returns to you’ (*an-Naml*: 40) meaning that their superior knowledge would enable them to retrieve the throne so speedily. When Sulaiman *peace be upon him* saw the throne before his eyes only a moment later, he declared, ‘This is from the favor of my Lord to test me whether I will be grateful or ungrateful.’ (*an-Naml*: 40)

The point is that the amount of time which any given action requires is conversely proportional to the capability of the agent; the stronger and more capable the agent is, the less time they need – as we explained in our discussion on the Prophet’s journey to Jerusalem and subsequent ascent into Heaven (*al-isra’ wa l-mi’raj*) the ‘extent of which is a thousand years of those which you count.’ (*as-Sajda*: 5) A thousand of our human years.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* continues in the chapter of *as-Sajda*:

ذَٰلِكَ عَلِيمٌ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ

**Such is He who knows all that is unseen as well
as what is seen, the Almighty, the Merciful [6]
(The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 6)**

The demonstrative ‘such’ refers to Allah’s arrangement of affairs of all of creation between the heavens and the earth and His following-up of the affairs and their results. Allah has the power to do this because He *Glorified is He* ‘the Knower of the unseen and the witnessed’ and because He *Glorified is He* is ‘the Exalted in Might, the Merciful.’ (*as-Sajda*: 6) The True Lord *Glorified is He* teaches us to understand that those in positions of authority are responsible for following up with their subordinates.

Although the fact that Allah possesses knowledge of what is beyond our mortal ken assumes that He possesses knowledge of our visible world, He

Glorified is He nevertheless mentions the latter as well so that no one will think that Allah is oblivious to what is present in our world. The True Lord *Glorified is He* can discern every sound and trace it back to its speaker; indeed, in this context, knowledge of what is openly said can actually be more subtle than knowledge of the Great Beyond.

‘The Almighty’ refers to the fact that Allah is indomitable, that He cannot be led astray, that His will toward the universe cannot be deflected – and yet, He is ‘The Merciful.’

الَّذِي أَحْسَنَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ، وَبَدَأَ خَلْقَ الْإِنْسَانِ مِنْ طِينٍ ﴿٧﴾

Who gave everything its perfect form. He first created man from clay [7] (The Quran, as-Sajda: 7)

‘To create’ means to bring something into existence from nothing, and then imbue it with a specific wisdom, a special purpose and mission. Allah has not created anything in vain, having fashioned everything to operate according to His law. Before Allah *Glorified is He* sets out to create something, He already knows exactly what He is creating and what purpose it will fulfil; to this end, He moulds everything with very precise specifications which enable them to carry out their purpose.

This divine design in everything may not be immediately apparent, as some creatures seem poorly designed. But as a wise man once realized after contemplating Allah’s universe, it would be impossible to create a more ingenious or wondrous world. Similarly, there was once a child who, seeing a blacksmith take ramrod iron poles and then bend and curve them, asked his father why the blacksmith did not just leave the iron rods straight. The father then explained that the iron cannot fulfil its purpose unless it is bent. After all, if a hook were arrow-straight, it certainly could not carry out its intended function.

This also helps us understand the Hadith where the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* says that, ‘Women were created from a [bent] rib. The most curved part of the rib is the uppermost part; if you try to straighten it out,

you will break it, and if you leave it, it will remain bent. So take care of your womenfolk and gently advise them.’⁽¹⁾

The ribcage can only fulfil its job of protecting the heart and lungs if it is crooked. Just as in women, it is this very crookedness which lends it the attributes of compassion, nurture, and protectiveness. Thus, a pregnant woman will show unparalleled gentleness to her unborn baby and go to great lengths to protect it, and when she bears it, she becomes that much more loving and protective.

The Prophet was not trying to insult or belittle women, but rather to point out that this ‘crookedness’ complements their role. For women, their role in life demands that their compassion outweigh their rationality, while for men, their rationality dominates their emotions so that they can better carry out the jobs they are charged with.

The point is that Allah has created everyone for a specific purpose. Every one of us, despite whatever manifest deficiencies we may have, possesses some strength that sets us apart. For instance, you might wonder why Allah would create someone without their full mental faculties, but perhaps they may compensate with some other skill, such as Herculean strength. Conversely, you might belittle someone for being short, but perhaps their limited height might make them more suitable for certain jobs.

There is another reason for this. If, for instance, you compare the number of students in elementary school with the number in college, of course there are significantly more in the former. Had it been otherwise, there would be no balance in society because if everyone were an alpha with a PhD, who would perform the more humble menial labour? This disparity is a social necessity because it might sound great to have a million Einsteins with a million genius plans, but if there are not legions of people willing to do the more monotonous work of implementing them, the plans are fairly useless. The worth of each person derives from how well they perform their trade, regardless of what that trade might be.

(1) Quoted by Al-Bukhari in his *(Authentic Narrations) (Sahih Al-Bukhari)* (3331) and Muslim in his *(Authentic Narrations) (Sahih Muslim)* (1468) from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra. As An-Nawawi noted in his commentary on Muslim, ‘i.e., the woman was created from the most bent part of the rib so that there is no use except to have patience with her crookedness.

And as we discussed before, no one should ever consider themselves superior to anyone else given that, while they might excel in one specific trait, others will excel them in other areas. The Creator has spread diverse talents among all of us. That is as the Quran says in this regard: ‘O you who have believed, let not a people ridicule [another] people; perhaps they may be better than them’. (*al-Hujurat*: 11)

Allah is the One ‘Who perfected everything which He created’. (*as-Sajda*: 7) Every creature has a specific function for which it has been formed. The tides of destiny can indeed be most strange: you can have identical twins – one working in a perfume shop and the other working at a sewage treatment plant; – both perfectly content with their line of work.

Indeed, those who are content with the defects Allah has decreed for them can surpass those who are otherwise well formed. A one-armed man will often have considerably larger hand capable of dealing a knockout blow. Such people often have skills or strengths lacking in ordinary folk.

You might object: If Allah has perfected everything He has created, then what about disbelief? After all, Allah created it, and it still exists; how is this supposed to be beautiful and wondrous?

I swear to Allah, if it were not for the excesses and crimes of the disbelievers, no one would have come to love faith, just as if it were not for inequity, we would never have truly savoured the sweetness of justice. Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* creates the antithesis of something in order to drive us to it.

Allah *Glorified is He* then continues, ‘And began the creation of man from clay.’ (*as-Sajda*: 7) This creature, this human, which Allah has honoured above all other beings, has been created from clay which, as an inanimate object, is on the lowest possible rung of the hierarchy of creation. As we mentioned before, all other creatures ultimately serve us, whether directly or indirectly: animals (which are closest to us), plants, and then inanimate objects. And it is from the latter that we are fashioned.

Allah makes it up to these lowly inanimate objects by obligating us to bow down and kiss one at least once in our lifetime. More specifically, when

we are performing the pilgrimage, we are required to express our reverence to the Lord by kissing the black stone on the *Ka'ba*. The pilgrims push through the immense throngs and fight over this honour, even though it is a lifeless stone and they are nothing less than Allah's deputies on earth. The sole purpose of this exercise is to smash our sense of superiority so that we can learn to be humble toward our fellow man.

As previously discussed, those who have an agenda to try to find mistakes in the holy scripture claim that the Quran is inconsistent in defining the primordial substance of humankind, since in one verse it says that we are created '...out of a liquid...' (*al-Mursalat*: 20), while in another it says, '...out of dust...' (*al-Kahf*: 37) and in yet a third it says, 'out of the essence of clay' (*al-Mu'minun*: 12), while in yet a fourth it says, 'out of sounding clay' (*al-Hijr*: 33) and in yet a fifth it says, 'out of sounding clay, out of dark slime transmuted.' (*al-Hijr*: 26)

But these merely represent different stages of a single substance; the wording does not necessarily indicate that any of them are the primary substance. Water plus dust produces clay, which when left out will start emitting a different odour and become a transmuted dark slime, which in turn, if left out, will dry and harden into sounding clay. Hence, there is no contradiction between these various verses and it is perfectly correct to say that humankind was made out of any one of them.

When these verses speak of the creation of humankind, they are referring specifically to that primordial man Adam *peace be upon him* whose essence Allah formed from a liquid disdained. Allah *Glorified is He* first fashioned us from clay and then provided us with mates with whom we reproduce to form other men and women.

Nevertheless, despite having laid out these intricate biological processes, the Lord *Glorified is He* still retains His absolute power to create as He pleases. He basically is saying to us: Do you not dare think that I cannot create more humans without both a man and a woman, for I can create without any parents as I did with Adam, I can create someone without a mother as I did with Eve, and I can create someone without a father as I did with 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*.

Conversely Allah may furnish all the necessary conditions for procreation to occur, but then make the woman barren.

Allah has demonstrated His ability to create a human being with every conceivable combination of factors: 'To Allah belong the dominion of the heavens and the earth; He creates what he wills. He gives to whom He wills female [children], and He gives to whom He wills males. Or He makes them [both] males and females, and He renders whom He wills barren. Indeed, He is Knowing and Competent.' (*ash-Shura*: 49-50)

The point is that human reproduction is completely subject to Allah's power, and is not simply a mechanical operation. Indeed, it is nothing less than a divine present: 'He gives to whom He wills female [children].' Note how the Quran mentions the gift of girl babies first, which is the less-preferred gender for many people. But those who are blessed with a baby girl should rejoice at Allah's gift and know that Allah may compensate them by marrying their daughter to a man who will prove to be more loving than their biological son ever would have been.

Similarly, those who are barren should see their sterility as a gift from Allah and should trust that Allah will compensate them by providing them with other people's children. After all, why should we not view sterility as a blessing, given how some children are perfectly capable of committing patricide in cold blood?

We should always express contentment and faith toward Allah, whether we are given children or deprived of them.

When Adam was created from clay, he was immediately fashioned as a full-formed adult; he did not start out as a child who had to go through the usual cycle of growth. As the Hadith mentions, Allah created him according to his image – i.e., Adam's own image.

The ambiguity in the wording of the Hadith in Arabic⁽¹⁾ has led some to claim that the pronoun 'his' in 'his image' actually refers to Allah, meaning

(1) *Abu Hurayra narrated from the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him that, "Allah created Adam according to his/His image, making him sixty cubits tall." Related by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) (6227) and Muslim in his (Sahih) (2841). In other words,=*

that Adam was created according to Allah's image (not to be confused with His reality); for Allah *Glorified is He* is living and bestows us with His life, He is strong and bestows us with His strength, He is rich and bestows us with His wealth, just as He is All Knowing and bestows us with His knowledge.

Hence the saying, 'Adorn yourselves with Allah's virtues', i.e., the traits of His manifested (as opposed to inherent) attributes. We should adorn ourselves with the divine attributes and make them our distinguishing virtue. Among these traits is that we should be harsh with the oppressors and gentle to the oppressed, as Allah *Glorified is He* describes the true believers: 'forceful against the disbelievers, merciful among themselves.' (*al-Fath*: 29)

'Humble toward the believers, powerful against the disbelievers.' (*al-Ma'ida*: 54): These contradictory traits come together in the true believer who takes on the characteristics appropriate for the given context.

In fact, laboratory testing has established that the sixteen primary elements which constitute the human body are the very same elements found in soil which include (from most to least): oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, sodium, magnesium, and potassium.



Then made his descendants from an extract of underrated fluid [8] (The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 8)

Allah creates this posterity from a 'liquid disdained,' which is the mixture of the man's semen and the woman's ovary.

Allah describes this liquid as 'disdained,' because it flows through the urinary tract and is then simply washed down the drain like filth. But this seemingly humble fluid is truly filled with wonders. Allah bless Al-'Aqqad⁽¹⁾

= Allah *Glorified is He* created Adam in a certain image which he continued to have until the end of his days, even after he had descended to earth. This statement was meant to refute the idea that Adam possessed different traits in paradise [as narrated by Ibn Hajar: (*Fath al-Bari* 3/11)].

(1) 'Abbas Mahmud Ibrahim Al-'Aqqad hailed from a family originally with roots in Damietta, Egypt, but which had subsequently relocated to Al-Mahallat Al-Kubra. One=

who once remarked, 'The elements of the entire world could fit in half-a-thimble.' Just think how many sperm shoot out of a man all at once. The supreme intricacy of how this simple seed contains the complete blueprint for a fully formed human being with their hue, sex, and other traits, is a powerful demonstration of the Creator's grandeur.

As we mentioned before, every single one of us carries a living part of our father Adam within us. The True Lord *Glorified is He* continues in this chapter:

ثُمَّ سَوَّاهُ وَنَفَخَ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِهِ ۖ وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ
وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ ۚ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٩﴾

Then He moulded him; He breathed from His Spirit into him; He gave you hearing, sight, and minds. How seldom you are grateful! [9] (The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 9)

It was that primordial man who was the first to be fashioned in due proportion from clay by Allah; as the Quran notes elsewhere: 'And when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My [created] soul, then fall down to him in prostration.' (*al-Hijr*: 29) During the course of this, Adam progressed through the various stages of development mentioned above – just as his progeny do – from a drop of sperm, into a germ-cell, then into an embryonic lump, etc, after which the spirit was breathed into him.

Although none of us have witnessed our own creation or the creation of the species, Allah *Glorified is He* has provided us with visible evidence to deduce this, namely through death. For the antithesis always represents the reverse image of the thesis; thus, when you go to tear down a huge building, you send the wrecking ball to take down the top floor, which was the last

= of his ancestors was known for 1) braiding silk, hence the surname Al-'Aqqad. 'Abbas himself was born in Aswan in 1889 C.E. to a Kurdish mother whose elementary school he attended. He worked in the railways, the Ministry of Religious Endowments in Cairo, as a teacher in several civil schools, and finally as a journalist and author. He was very popular for over half a century during which time he composed eighty-three books, the most famous of which was (*Ingenuities*) (*Al-'Abqariyyat*). He passed away in Cairo in 1964 at seventy-five years [*(The Notables)* (*Al-A'lam*) 266/3].

thing to be finished during construction. Similarly, by rewinding the stages of our own demise, we can reconstruct how we came to be imbued with life.

The first thing to go in death is the spirit, which was the last element to be placed in at birth. Then the body starts to become rigor mortis, i.e., it stiffens up, corresponding to the sounding clay-stage in creation. Then the cadaver putrefies, becoming like transmuted dark slime, after which it decomposes and all the water in the body evaporates, leaving only dust, from which it all began.

The point is that we should take death, which we have witnessed with our own eyes, as proof of the veracity of the Quranic narrative of our origins.

He ‘...made for you hearing and vision and hearts’ As mentioned earlier, anatomists have delineated what purpose each organ serves and when exactly they begin to function after birth. After the child exits the womb, it is their ears which start working first; notice how, if you snap your fingers in front of their eyes, they will not blink, but if you snap them next to their ears, they will definitely flinch. This is because infants are born with a fully developed auditory sense, while their eyesight takes another three to ten days to kick in. Also note how our hearing is always on, even when we are asleep, while our eyes conk out with us while we rest.

This contrast is alluded to in the story of the people of the cave. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to put these righteous youth in a deep slumber, He made sure to cover up their ears to keep them from being disturbed by the howls of the winds and the wild beasts that fill the desert landscape: ‘So We cast [a cover of sleep] over their ears within the cave for a number of years’ (*al-Kahf*: 11).

The ear is the first organ to become fully operational, followed by the eyes, followed by the other organs, the last of which is the nervous system. That is why an infant can have a fever of forty degrees and still go on bouncing around in blissful oblivion. This is because their nervous system has still not developed to the point where this would cause them discomfort. This is why the Quran always mentions the faculty of hearing before the faculty of sight, with the single exception being the verse where Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘...we have seen and heard...’ (*as-Sajda*: 12). This is because the Quran

wants to emphasize the visualization of the scene of Resurrection, where the deniers of truth are suddenly confronted with the terror of the Hereafter. The visual scene arrests them before they can hear voice summoning us to Allah's judgment. With regards to the Quran's rhetorical style, it is really interesting how the plural for 'hearing' *asma* shares the same morphological form as the plural for 'sight' *absar* given how Arabic plurals are often wildly divergent. Nevertheless, this verse uses the singular for 'hearing' but the plural for 'sight'. Allah *the Almighty* says: '...He gave you hearing, sight...' (*as-Sajda*: 9). The question is: why? Scholars have said: Our ears cannot seal themselves up, whereas our eyes can be covered in darkness by the eyelids. Thus, while you and I will always hear external sounds in an identical manner. With regards to vision, my eye might perceive something differently than yours. 'Sight' is never mentioned in the singular in the Quran except for in one verse where Allah *the Almighty* says: '...surely the hearing and the sight and the heart, all of these, shall be questioned about that.' (*al-Isra*': 36) This is because the verse is discussing how each organ must testify to the truth, and since they all have one responsibility, there must be one generic faculty to carry this responsibility. It is appropriate that Allah *the Almighty* mentions these senses after discussing our creation, given that, when we are in our mother's womb, we are completely oblivious, and it is only after these organs develop that we can learn and acquire an understanding of what is going on around us. As Allah *the Almighty* says: 'and Allah has brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers— you did not know anything— and He gave you hearing and sight and hearts that you may give thanks.' (*an-Nahl*: 78) These organs are essential conditions for us to carry out our duty as Allah's deputies on earth because it is only through them that we can engage our social environment. In order to really learn, we need to use each of our senses in their appropriate context: the tongue for speech, the eye for vision, the ear for hearing, the nose for smell, and the fingers for touching. These 'exterior senses' allow us to discern all other derivative physical traits. For instance, our sense of measuring distance enables us to sense the thickness of an object, while our sense of muscle allows us to sense weight and heaviness. The point is that when we are born, we need these senses to be able to engage in society. If we lived in isolation, we might be able to do without some of these senses, such as speech. But

since it is our nature to live in a group, we need to be able to communicate with others, which before anything require that we are able to hear so that we can learn how to express our thoughts. Language is acquired through listening; a child reared in an Arabic-speaking environment will end up speaking Arabic, while a child who is brought up in an English-speaking environment will grow up speaking English. The tongue imitates what the ear hears; without immersion in a living spoken language, it is impossible to acquire fluency. The chapter of *al-Baqara* describes the hypocrites as: ‘deaf, dumb...’ (*al-Baqara*: 18), the latter quality being a direct consequence of the former, Hearing, which is our first functioning sense, provides us with the necessary grounding to be able to start to interact with our environment. Learning how to read requires a teacher to explain how to pronounce the written letters. Conversely, without someone to read the letters and words out loud, it is not possible to learn how to correctly pronounce or write them. Furthermore, it is through hearing that Allah’s Word is conveyed from the heavens down to the earth; and this is why hearing is usually given precedence over seeing in the Quran. The Quran tells us that Allah *the Almighty* taught humanity words such ‘earth’ and ‘sky’ by articulating them out loud, just as we humans teach our children by pointing to our ear and voicing ‘e-a-r.’ After the students learn how to read from their teacher, they can then read by themselves, switching their focus from listening to seeing. They can then foster their academic bent further by learning and figuring new things out on their own which even their teacher might not know. This is in fact the function of the heart-mind (*Al-fu’ad*); Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘...and made for you the ears and the eyes and the hearts...’ (*as-Sajda*: 9). Concepts are formed through all these senses, enabling us to become fully-formed with the faculty to learn and to teach in turn. Spoken language can only be passed on through the spoken word. I learned how to communicate from my parents, who in turn learned from their parents, all the way back in an unbroken chain to Adam *Allah’s peace be upon him* the father of all humankind. But from whom did Adam acquire his language? From Allah *the Almighty* Who taught him the names of all things? He *the Almighty* says: ‘...and He taught Adam all the names, then presented them to the angels; then He said: Tell me the names of those if you are right.’ (*al-Baqara*: 31) This makes sense, given how it would have been impossible for us to have

come up with the idea of a spoken language without ever having experienced it. Nevertheless, some people object to this explanation of the origin of language, since it seems to posit that language is immutable. This is true to a certain extent, however, we are capable of using the language Allah *the Almighty* gave Adam *peace be upon him* to coin new words for new concepts. So, where did words like 'radio' or 'television' come from? As new concepts, they needed new and unprecedented appellations (although it should be noted that words can only be used to indicate pre-existing concepts). This is the job of the language academies, that is, to produce new coinages or approve of those already in circulation. The point is that we come up with new terms and then agree on them so that they can be used to express certain concepts. But even though they are new and unprecedented, these terms are still ultimately driven from the language which Adam *peace be upon him* was taught. Although language may have originally come from a stock of unchanging words and structures, it has subsequently developed into a system very much shaped by human innovation. After mentioning His Favours on us, Allah *the Almighty* says, '...little is it that you give thanks.' (*as-Sajda*: 9)

Even though we are obliged to express our gratitude for these blessings, very few of us do so. We really should thank Allah *the Almighty* every time we use our ears, eyes or minds to explore new ideas. The true believer never ceases thanking their Lord *the Almighty*; every day for them is a holiday, a special occasion to celebrate Allah's Praise. We celebrate special holidays like *Eid Al-Fitr* when we break the fast and perform the *Eid* prayer, and *Eid Al-Adha* when we commemorate Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* offer to sacrifice his son – which was meant to spare all of us from having to undergo such a terrible ordeal – by sacrificing an animal and fulfilling the rites of the pilgrimage. But outside of these two official holidays, should we not rejoice every time we pray, or fast, or give alms? Why do not we celebrate every time we obey Allah's Commands and avoid His Prohibitions? Why do we not rejoice here in this world in anticipation of that day of supreme joy when we shall be recompensed for all these good deeds with the bliss of Heaven? In another chapter, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Surely (as for) those who believe and do good, their Lord will guide them by their faith; there shall flow from beneath them rivers in gardens of bliss. Their cry in it shall be: Glory to You,

O Allah! And their greeting in it shall be: Peace; and the last of their cry shall be: Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds.’ (*Yunus*: 9-10)

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَقَالُوا أَإِذَا ضَلَلْنَا فِي الْأَرْضِ أَإِنَّا لَفِي خَلْقٍ جَدِيدٍ بَلْ هُمْ بِلِقَاءِ رَبِّهِمْ كَفِرُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

They say, ‘What? When we have disappeared into the earth, shall we really be created anew?’ In fact, they deny the meeting with their Lord [10] (The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 10)

As for the saying of Allah: ‘...we have disappeared into the earth...’ (*as-Sajda*: 10), it indicates their wonder of how could they be created anew after their mortal organs have faded into the ground and the last traces of their existence have vanished, having been recycled back into other living organisms. Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘... shall we really be created anew...’ (*as-Sajda*: 10) meaning that will Allah really piece us back together? Allah *the Almighty* responds to them: ‘...nay, they deny the meeting with their Lord.’ (*as-Sajda*: 10) The word *bal* (nay) indicates that what was just said is false, and that the truth of the matter is as follows: they are not really trying to question the veracity of Resurrection – the clear signs of its reality making it rather difficult to plausibly deny – but rather of the inevitable meeting with Allah *the Almighty*. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘...nay, they deny the meeting with their Lord.’ (*as-Sajda*: 10) The word ‘nay’ refutes their claim and introduces a new fact that they do not deny the Resurrection but the meeting with their Lord. He *the Almighty* says: ‘...nay, they deny the meeting with their Lord.’ (*as-Sajda*: 10) This is because it is impossible to deny Resurrection with its clear evidence. Or as Allah *the Almighty* says elsewhere: ‘Were We then fatigued with the first creation? Yet are they in doubt with regard to a new creation?’ (*Qaf*: 15) Allah’s Ability to create from nothing assumes His Ability to recreate, given that He merely needs to reorder substances which are already there, since to recreate something is of course easier than to create it from scratch, a point which is clear in the following verse in which Allah says: ‘And He it is Who originates the creation, then reproduces it, and it is easy to Him...’ (*ar-Rum*: 27). Although they are denying only the meeting with Allah, and not Resurrection itself, their denial of the former

necessarily amounts to a denial of the latter, for the Last Day is the stage which allows for our meeting with Allah *the Almighty* – for which they have no small amount of aversion.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قُلْ يَنُوفِقُكُمْ مَّلَكُ الْمَوْتِ الَّذِي وُكِّلَ بِكُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿١١﴾

**Say, ‘The Angel of Death put in charge of you will reclaim you, and then you will be brought back to your Lord’ [11]
(The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 11)**

Note how the disbelievers focus on Resurrection, which represents the renewal of life. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘They say, ‘What? When we have disappeared into the earth, shall we really be created anew...’ (*as-Sajda*: 10)? Yet the Quran here focuses on death and its very antithesis to remind them of the reality of the next life. The verb *tawaffa* (gather) originally comes from the expression ‘I reclaimed (*tawaffaytu*) my loan from him’, that is, I completely took back all my money. Here, of course, this refers to death (*Al-Wafat*) which also shares the same root. Sometimes, the Quran attributes the process of death to Allah *the Almighty* as in Allah’s saying: ‘Allah takes the souls at the time of their death...’ (*az-Zumar*: 42), while others to the angel of death, as in Allah’s saying: ‘...Say, ‘The Angel of Death put in charge of you will reclaim you...’ (*as-Sajda*: 11), and sometimes to another one of Allah’s angelic deputies, as in Allah’s saying: ‘...until when death comes to one of you, Our Messengers cause him to die, and they are not remiss.’ (*al-An‘am*: 61) Allah *the Almighty* Alone is the One Who can bestow life and revoke it. This is why He *the Almighty* has forbidden killing, and has damned those who commit murder because they destroy Allah’s Creation. When someone is destined to die, Allah *the Almighty* permits ‘Azra’il⁽¹⁾ to take his soul. There are three stages in this process: first, when He *the Almighty* decides to reclaim someone’s soul, He issues His Order to ‘Azra’il who then sends the order down to the angels responsible for this task; lastly, these angels carry out the command. In the chapter of *al-An‘am*, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘...Our Messengers cause him to die...’ (*al-An‘am*: 61) which means

(1) ‘Azra’il is the Hebrew name of the Angel of Death.

that the angels completely reclaim his soul. Note how the Quran does not say that the angels destroy his soul. So, we describe someone who has passed away as having had his soul seized, meaning that his soul has returned to the Heavenly host where it had abided before it was embedded in the body. After the soul is taken, the body decomposes back into its original elements, which then dissolve into the earth to be subsequently recycled into various organisms. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘They say, “What? When we have disappeared into the earth, shall we really be created anew?”’ (*as-Sajda*: 10). Death does not entail annihilation; both the soul and body still exist, albeit in modified form, and they can be reassembled by Allah *the Almighty* at any time. This point is essential to understand the story of ‘Isa (Jesus); Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘and when Allah said: O ‘Isa, I am going to terminate the period of your stay (on earth) and cause you to ascend unto Me...’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 55). Some Scholars maintain that this verse means that ‘Isa *peace be upon him* passed away first, after which he was raised up to Allah. Here, the preposition *waw* (and) does not indicate chronological order. For instance, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And when We made a covenant with the Prophets and with you, and with Nuh (Noah) and Ibrahim (Abraham) and Musa (Moses) and ‘Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam...’ (*al-Ahzab*: 7), the (*waw*)-preposition cannot possibly indicate chronological sequence, given that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came thousands of years after Nuh *peace be upon him*. The reason Allah *the Almighty* mentions the passage of ‘Isa *peace be upon him* before his being raised up is to stress that the Messiah was a mortal, subject to death. Again, the verb *tawaffa* does not only mean that Allah *the Almighty* caused ‘Isa to die, but also that He *the Almighty* completely reclaimed his soul, which in turn indicates that he was completely raised unto Allah, and therefore could not have been crucified. Allah’s saying: ‘Say, ‘The Angel of Death put in charge of you will reclaim you...’ (*as-Sajda*: 11) is a response to the disbelievers’ statement in which they say: ‘...When we have disappeared into the earth, shall we really be created anew...’ (*as-Sajda*: 10). Allah *the Almighty* Who has created us, is not saying that He will completely eliminate our existence at the termination of our life span, but rather that He *the Almighty* will reclaim us. After we die, our souls and the elements which make up our body remain with Allah. Given that the Lord created us from

nothing, He is perfectly capable of piecing back together every atom of our body. As for the Saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘...put in charge of you...’ (*as-Sajda*: 11), it means that the angel of death constantly accompanies us, attentively watching over us – there can be no escape. As the Gnostics say, ‘death is an arrow which is unwaveringly flying toward us, our life span representing nothing more than the distance between us and that arrow which will need eventually pierce our heart.’ As we discussed before, the Arabic word *musiba* (catastrophe) is derived from the verb *asaba* because it is something that will ineluctably befall (*yusibu*) you. As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘...and then you will be brought back to your Lord’ (*as-Sajda*: 11), it means that this will take place on the Day of Judgment.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذِ الْمُجْرِمُونَ نَاكِسُوا رُءُوسِهِمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ رَبَّنَا
 أَبْصَرْنَا وَسَمِعْنَا فَارْجِعْنَا نَعْمَلْ صَالِحًا إِنَّا مُوقِنُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

[Prophet], if only you could see the wrongdoers hang their heads before their Lord: ‘Our Lord, now that we have seen and heard, send us back and we shall do good. [Now] we are convinced’ [12] (The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 12)

This verse describes for us one of the scenes from the Resurrection where the wicked will be humiliatingly dragged to their well-deserved torment. This is similar to witnessing a criminal being dragged away in handcuffs by the police in utter humiliation; just watching them being given their just desserts after all the mischief they have caused makes you feel better. During this scene, Allah *the Almighty* is immediately addressing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and by extension, the Muslim *Ummah* (adherents of Islam), in general: ‘[Prophet], if only you could see the wrongdoers hang their heads before their Lord...’ (*as-Sajda*: 12). The implicit message in this verse is, ‘...this extraordinary sight would make you feel better about all the suffering they had caused you.’ Notice the nuance of this expression: ‘...[Prophet], if only you could see...’ (*as-Sajda*: 12); the Quran did not say, for instance, ‘If you only knew...’ because when Allah *the Almighty* conveys something to you, it is even more real and certain than if your very eyes had seen it; after all,

your eyes can deceive you, whereas Allah's Word is the immutable truth. As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '...the wrongdoers hang their heads...' (*as-Sajda*: 12), the Arabic word *nakas* means to lower that which is normally raised up. In this context, what is being lowered is the head, which is the highest and most dignified appendage of the human person. This verb also appears in the scene in the chapter of *al-Anbiya* wherein Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* smashes the idols with a hatchet, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Then they were made to hang down their heads: Certainly you know that they do not speak.' (*al-Anbiya*: 65) In response to Ibrahim's challenge to ask their idols about who was responsible for this vandalism, the polytheists momentarily came to their senses and reproached themselves for their sin, before relapsing back into their wicked ways; Allah *the Almighty* says about this: '...Certainly you know that they do not speak.' (*al-Anbiya*: 65) This root also appears in the chapter of *Ya Sin* in which Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And whomsoever We cause to live long, We reduce (him) to an abject state in constitution; do they not then understand?' (*Ya Sin*: 68) This means that after bestowing on someone youth and vigour, Allah *the Almighty* will later make them old and decrepit, a point which is proved by the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '...and of you is he who is brought back to the worst part of life, so that after having knowledge he does not know anything...' (*an-Nahl*: 70). After a lusty youth full of vitality, we end up walking with a cane, or perhaps not walking at all, needing someone to carry us like an infant; this is the natural decline (*Al-Tankis*) which awaits us in old age. This should make us realise that dying before our twilight years can be a huge blessing, as it both spares us our physical suffering and relieves our family of the burden of having to take care of us. The scene of the wicked bowing their heads in shame is also meant as a warning to those who would dare sin against Allah. Those who comport themselves with arrogance in this world will be forced to lower their heads in shame in the next, while those who humble themselves before Allah *the Almighty* will have their heads raised up high in dignity in the Hereafter. This is the meaning of the Hadith: 'Those who humble themselves before Allah will be raised up by Him.'⁽¹⁾ But this also has another significance:

(1) See Abu Na'im, *Hilyat Al-Awliya*, 46/8, on the authority of Abu Hurayra who related that Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him said: 'Those who humble themselves=

in the Hereafter, Allah *the Almighty* will punish the wicked with what they themselves used to do; in this case, it was the disbelievers who themselves used to hang their heads low, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Now surely they fold up their breasts that they may conceal (their enmity) from Him...' (*Hud*: 5). This means that they would lower their heads so that they would not have to confront Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*. The truth exudes a certain authority, a certain force, which causes falsehood to melt in front of it. Hence, when the followers of the Truth challenge the followers of falsehood by saying, 'Come and face us; look us straight in the eye!' the latter inevitably run away in shame, as an open confrontation would most definitely not be in their interest. This unwillingness to face the truth can lead people to commit the most horrendous crimes, including murder. Murder, instead of being a sign of strength, is actually a sign of weakness and cowardice because, if the murderer were truly strong, they would not feel threatened by the presence of their nemesis. Another example of how Allah *the Almighty* punishes the sinners with their own actions is the way He deals with those misers who hoard their wealth; He *the Almighty* says: '...and (as for) those who hoard up gold and silver and do not spend it in Allah's way, announce to them a painful chastisement; On the day when it shall be heated in the fire of hell, then their foreheads and their sides and their backs shall be branded with it; this is what you hoarded up for yourselves, therefore taste what you hoarded.' (*at-Tawba*: 34-35) Glory be to Allah! This is almost exactly what they themselves used to do to others. If a poor person came to them to ask for some help, they would give them an evil look, and then turn away from them and show them their side and then show them their back – the very limbs which Allah *the Almighty* brands in punishment. The point is that those who have any sense should take care to avoid committing these sins; otherwise they will find themselves repaid in kind later on. On the Last Day, when the wicked are bowing their heads in shame before Allah *the Almighty* they will proclaim: '...we have seen and heard...' (*as-Sajda*: 12). This is a direct quote even though the Quran does not segue into it with 'They would say...', since classical Arabic does

= *before Allah the Almighty will be raised up by Him*'; and also from the Hadith of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab (129/7), 'People, be humble, for I heard Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him say: 'Those who humble themselves before Allah will be raised up by Him.'

not employ quotation marks, it is usually necessary to indicate a quote with the verb ‘to say’. This omission alludes to how supremely difficult it will be for them to spit out these words, to admit their cardinal sin and beg for forgiveness. As noted above, this is the single verse in the Quran where the faculty of sight is mentioned before the faculty of hearing, the reason being that when the Hour arrives, we will behold the terrors of the Judgment with our eyes before our eardrums reverberate with any sound. Allah *the Almighty* visualises for us this overwhelming terror by describing how it will be, saying: ‘...and you shall see men intoxicated, and they shall not be intoxicated but the chastisement of Allah will be severe.’ (*al-Hajj*: 2) Going back to our conversation on the Quranic treatment of the heart and the faculties of hearing and seeing: there is another important verse I forgot to mention; Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Allah has set a seal upon their hearts and upon their hearing and there is a covering over their eyes, and there is a great punishment for them.’ (*al-Baqara*: 7) Here, the heart is mentioned first. Both the heart and the ears are ‘sealed,’ while the eyes are ‘veiled.’ In the previous verse, these organs are mentioned as Allah’s Gift to us, starting with hearing, moving to sight, and then ending with the heart. But since this verse describes how Allah *the Almighty* takes these blessings away, it accordingly begins with that which is most important. So He *the Almighty* mentioned heart, hearing and sight, respectively. Going back to Allah’s saying: ‘...Our Lord, now that we have seen and heard...’ (*as-Sajda*: 12), what exactly is it that they finally saw and heard? On the Day of Judgment, the deniers of Truth will admit the Existence of Allah; He *the Almighty* says: ‘...and there he finds Allah...’ (*an-Nur*: 39) meaning that the first thing they see is that Allah *the Almighty* is Unique, completely disassociated from any of the alleged partners in His Divinity which they used to worship. Only then do the disbelievers realise that they have no protector or intercessor beside Allah *the Almighty*. As for the saying of Allah: ‘...we have heard...’ (*as-Sajda*: 12), it means they have finally heard the revelation and have borne witness to the veracity of its provenance. Now they finally admit that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not making up the Quran, that he was not some rhymester, or voodoo artist, or liar, or any of the other awful things they used to call him with.⁽¹⁾ But what good

(1) See *Al-Qurtubi, Tafsir*, 5353/7; he says: ‘The meaning of the saying of Allah, ‘...[Now] we have seen...’ (*as-Sajda*: 12) refers to what they used to reject as a lie, while ‘...we=

does this admission do them now? How can it avail them anything⁽¹⁾ now that they have been brought to the realm of judgment, and are no longer in the realm of work and moral responsibility? This very much resembles what Pharaoh said in his last moments as he lay drowning beneath the billows of the Red Sea; Allah *the Almighty* says: '...he said: I believe that there is no god, but He in Whom the children of Israel believe...' (*Yunus*: 90). But as Allah *the Almighty* responded: 'What! Now! And indeed you disobeyed before and you were of the mischief-makers.' (*Yunus*: 91) He *the Almighty* says: '... Our Lord, now that we have seen and heard...' (*as-Sajda*: 12). The deniers of Truth are confessing that they were in the wrong and that they now want to do what is right, as the Quran says elsewhere: 'Until when death overtakes one of them, he says: Send me back, my Lord, send me back. Haply I may do good in that which I have left. By no means! It is a (mere) word that he speaks...' (*al-Mu'minun*: 99-100). But as Allah *the Almighty* says in this regard: '... By no means! It is a (mere) word that he speaks...' (*al-Mu'minun*: 100) because the truth of the matter is what Allah *the Almighty* says elsewhere in the Quran: '...and if they were sent back, they would certainly go back to that which they are forbidden, and most surely they are liars.' (*al-An'am*: 28) Similarly, in this scene, the deniers of Truth cry out as Allah *the Almighty* says: '...Our Lord, now that we have seen and heard, send us back and we shall do good. [Now] we are convinced.' (*as-Sajda*: 12) Can they really claim to have achieved 'certainty' under these circumstances? After all, to possess certain faith (*yaqin*) entails holding an absolute conviction in something beyond your senses. Given that these disbelievers have become certain of the truth only after it has become physically manifest before them, their newfound faith does not really amount to the proverbial mound of beans⁽²⁾.

= have heard...' (*as-Sajda*: 12) refers to what they used to deny as true. Another possible interpretation is: '... [Now] we have seen...' (*as-Sajda*: 12) refers to the truth of Allah's threats, and '...we have heard...' (*as-Sajda*: 12) refers to Allah's Affirmation of the veracity of His Prophets.'

(1) Qatada notes that, 'They finally regained their vision when it could no longer be of any use to them, just as they finally regained their hearing when it could no longer be of any use to them.' See As-Suyti, *Ad-Durr Al-Manthur*, 544/6, on the authority of 'Abd ibn Hamid, Ibn Al-Mundhir, and Ibn Abu Hatim.

(2) See Al-Qurtubi, *Tafsir*, 5354/7; he says: 'It has been said that the meaning of '...[Now] we are convinced...' (*as-Sajda*: 12) is that their doubts have been cleared up and that=

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلَوْ شِئْنَا لَآتَيْنَا كُلَّ نَفْسٍ هُدًى وَلَكِنْ حَقَّ الْقَوْلُ مِنِّي لَأَمْلَأَنَّ
جَهَنَّمَ مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿١٣﴾

‘If it had been Our will, We could certainly have given every soul its true guidance, but My words have come true. “I shall be sure to fill Hell with jinn and men together” [13] (The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 13)

At this point, you might pose the question: ‘Why does Allah *the Almighty* make some people believers and others deniers of the Truth, some people righteous and others wicked? Why did Allah *the Almighty* not create all of us to be good Friday mosque-goers? Is this too difficult for Him *the Almighty*?! No, of course, this is not arduous for Him *the Almighty* in the slightest, as demonstrated by the fact that He has made the angels completely obedient to Him and ready to carry out all His commands whenever He orders them. As He *the Almighty* says: ‘...they do not disobey Allah in what He commands them, and do as they are commanded.’ (*at-Tahrim*: 6) So too are the earth, heavens and mountains perpetually engaged in His Worship and glorification: ‘...He knows the prayer of each one and its glorification...’ (*an-Nur*: 41). Allah *the Almighty* also says: ‘... and there is not a single thing but glorifies Him with His praise, but you do not understand their glorification...’ (*al-Isra*’: 44). Allah *the Almighty* does in fact enable some people to comprehend the hymns of other creatures, as is the case with Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* for instance: ‘...and We made the mountains, and the birds to celebrate Our praise with Dawud...’ (*al-Anbiya*’: 79). The mountains of course praise Allah *the Almighty* simultaneously with all the other creatures in their environs, but with Prophet Dawud *peace be upon him* they would sing in harmony, a single chorus echoing a single hymn. The story of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* similarly tells us how creatures such as the hoopoe bird appreciate

= although they had heard and seen during their worldly lives, they had not engaged in contemplation, and were therefore no better than those who were deaf and blind. When, in the Hereafter, they finally woke up to reality, it was as if they had just started hearing and seeing for the first time.’

the Oneness of Allah, and so do the most pious human; thus, after the hoopoe carried out a reconnaissance mission on the court of the Queen of Sheba (Balqis), it said: ‘... I found her and her people adoring the sun instead of Allah, and the Shaytan (Satan) has made their deeds fair-seeming to them and thus turned them from the way, so they do not go aright.’ (*an-Naml*: 24) It also said: ‘That they do not make obeisance to Allah, Who brings forth what is hidden in the heavens and the earth and knows what you hide and what you make manifest.’ (*an-Naml*: 25) One of the ways in which Allah *the Almighty* demonstrates His Unbounded Power is to make the weak strong and the strong weak. The first believers were meek and oppressed, but after they entered Islam, Allah *the Almighty* raised them up and made them masters. There is a famous story⁽¹⁾ where Abu Bakr once invited lowly people such as ‘Ammar and Bilal into his domicile, while leaving the big-shots of Quraysh standing outside the door. His father reproached him for letting in the slaves while leaving the nobles out in the cold, but Abu Bakr responded, ‘Father, these wretches have been exalted by their submission to Allah; if the leaders of Quraysh have their noses bent out of shape because these servants have been let into my house before them, how much more apoplectic do you think they will be when Allah *the Almighty* lets them into paradise first?’ The fact that – of all people – Abu Bakr would do this is pretty amazing, given how he was usually known as being extremely gentle. These are characteristic examples of the sort of paradoxical characteristic traits and ironic table turning we find in the Islamic canon. In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* has the believers mock their erstwhile tormentors in the Hereafter: ‘Surely they who are guilty used to laugh at those who believe. And when they passed by them, they winked at one another.’ (*al-Mutaffifin*: 29-30); this means that the Arab polytheists used to mock the early Muslims, just as today the sinners sarcastically say to the pious, ‘Lift us up with your wings.’ It would have been bad enough if this were all the sinners did, but they then go back to their buddies and brag about how they have harassed the believers; Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And when they returned to their own followers they returned exulting. And when they saw them, they said: Most surely these are in error.

(1) The story of Abu Bakr As-Siddiq and his father rebuking him

And they were not sent to be keepers over them.’ (*al-Mutaffifin*: 31-33) But He *the Almighty* has the last word: ‘So today those who believe shall laugh at the unbelievers. On thrones, they will look.’ (*al-Mutaffifin*: 34-35) He *Glorified is He* then rhetorically asks: ‘Surely the disbelievers are rewarded as they did.’ (*al-Mutaffifin*: 36) Here, He *the Almighty* says that no one should dare think for a second that they can resist His Will. Allah *the Almighty* tells us what He wants us to do, and then gives us free will, to see who actually commits himself to a life of faith in practice. It is He Who has the power to make someone believe or to not believe. Allah’s Knowledge of all things stretches from pre-eternity, so He already knows all events past, present, and future, including whether we will turn out to be righteous or wicked. But, nevertheless, He has enabled us to live our lives so that our own actions justify our fate. Thus, we should never ever dare think that we are able of our own volition to resist the overwhelming Will of Allah, the Most-High. As for those who arrogantly defy Allah’s Commands, I say: ‘Why do you not defy sickness and death?’ They cannot because they are still nothing more than His slaves despite their own supercilious selves. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘If it had been Our Will, We could certainly have given every soul its true guidance...’ (*as-Sajda*: 13). In other words, He *the Almighty* could have made us all angels, devoid of the free will to choose sin because all other creatures – and not just the children of Adam– were given the ability to choose or reject the great trust of free will, but only our species accepted it with all that it entailed, whereas the others decided to use their choice to submit to Allah *the Almighty* and not risk the potential of sin latent in free will. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Surely We offered the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to be unfaithful to it and feared from it, and man has turned unfaithful to it; surely he is unjust, ignorant.’ (*al-Ahzab*: 72) As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘If it had been Our will, We could certainly have given every soul its true guidance...’ (*as-Sajda*: 13), this means the guidance of succour whereby Allah *the Almighty* provides the believers with through various blessings to help them advance on the path of faith, in contrast to the guidance of direction, whereby He *the Almighty* merely points out the path of goodness. Everyone is granted the latter, but only those who prove themselves completely ready to follow the code of

faith are granted the guidance of succour, as Allah *the Almighty* notes: 'And (as for) those who follow the right direction, He increases them in guidance and gives them their guarding (against evil).' (*Muhammad*: 17) The difference between these two types of guidance is illustrated in chapter of *Fussilat* where Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And as to Thamud, We showed them the right way...' (*Fussilat*: 17); this means that He *the Almighty* showed them the way of truth, '...but they chose error above guidance...' (*Fussilat*: 17). Allah *the Almighty* then says: '...but My words have come true. "I shall be sure to fill Hell with jinn and men together."' (*as-Sajda*: 13) He *Glorified is He* wants to make it clear to us that He understands our nature far better than we ourselves ever could, as forcefully shown by experience that any deviation from Allah's Will inevitably leads to the degeneration of society. Allah *the Almighty* allows the innocent to be harmed by the wicked so that they may be spurred to return to the fold of His Law. For it is then that they appreciate that only by implementing the Heavenly Way can they lead wholesome lives free of the disruptions inevitably wrought by evil. This is why when Allah *the Almighty* executes His vengeance on the wicked; we praise Him for sparing us their mischief. The point is that rebelling against Allah's Commands and defying the very core tenant of the Way, i.e. belief in Allah makes clear, in the starkest manner possible, the virtues of faith. Those of us who are morally accountable should commit ourselves to the Divine Law with all what it entails of rights and obligations, which are ultimately both sides of the same coin; thus, when Allah *the Almighty* forbids us from stealing, He is simultaneously upholding our own property rights. As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '...but My words have come true...' (*as-Sajda*: 13), it means that the Word of Allah has been definitively established or, as articulated by the chapter of *as-Saffat*, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And certainly Our word has already gone forth in respect of Our servants, the Messengers.' (*as-Saffat*: 171), and by the chapter of *al-Mu'minun* with regards to the story of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* Allah, '...take into it of every kind a pair, two, and your followers, except those among them against whom the word has gone forth...' (*al-Mu'minun*: 27), Or as the deniers of Truth are quoted as saying on the Day of Judgment: 'So the sentence of our Lord has come to pass against us: (now) we shall surely taste.' (*as-Saffat*: 31) As

for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘...I shall be sure to fill Hell with jinn and men together.’ (*as-Sajda*: 13), as we know, Allah *Glorified is He* has created both Paradise and the people He intends to fill it with, just as He has created both Hell and the people He intends to fill it with. Now, this is not an issue of space: Paradise could easily encompass everyone in creation if they all turned out righteous, as could Hell if everyone were adjudged wicked transgressors. This is why when the believers enter Heaven, they are said to ‘inherit’ the places reserved for the disbelievers who end up south of the border⁽¹⁾. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘...and it shall be cried out to them that this is the garden of which you are made heirs for what you did.’ (*al-A‘raf*: 43) The term ‘Invisible beings’ refers to the jinn and the *‘ifrits* (powerful jinni).

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَذُوقُوا يَمَّا نَسِيْتُمْ لِقَاءَ يَوْمِكُمْ هَٰذَا إِنَّا نَسِيْتَكُمْ
وَذُوقُوا عَذَابَ الْخُلْدِ يَمَّا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

**So since you ignored the meeting on this Day of yours,
now We shall ignore you: taste the lasting suffering for
all you have done [14] (The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 14)**

The implicit message is: ‘taste the torment of Hell!’, as stated explicitly in the chapter of *al-Qamar* in which Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘...taste the touch of hell’ (*al-Qamar*: 48). This also will be said to the chief disbelievers. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Taste; you forsooth are the mighty, the honourable.’ (*ad-Dukhan*: 49) Although any of our senses can be utilised to indulge in epicurean delights, the sense of taste is singled out because it is directly related to our most basic function of survival: eating and drinking. In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* elaborates on the effect of this ‘tasting’, saying with

(1) See Ibn Majah, *As-Sunnan*, Hadith no. 4341, on the authority of Abu Hurayra who narrated that Prophet Muhammad Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him said: ‘Every single person has two stations: one in Paradise and one in Hell. If someone dies and enters the Fire, their station is inherited by one of the inhabitants of Paradise; and this is the meanings of the verse: ‘These are they who are the heirs.’ (*al-Mu‘minun*: 10) Al-Busayri notes in his *Az-Zawa‘id* that, ‘The chain of narration of this Hadith fulfills Al-Bukhari and Muslim’s conditions for authenticity.’

regard to a certain community which had rejected their Lord: ‘...Allah made it to taste the utmost garment of hunger and fear because of what they wrought.’ (*an-Nahl*: 112) The image here is of hunger being a piece of clothing which envelops your entire body. He *the Almighty* says: ‘...garment of hunger...’ (*an-Nahl*: 112), this means that ‘to express the comprehensiveness of this deprivation where every organ – and not just the stomach – is forced to taste the bitterness of famine.’ Could this poetic meaning possibly be articulated more forcefully than by this wonderful image? Once, a certain poet had an epiphany of how divine love can be so utterly enveloping when it alights upon our heart and emanates into all of our other appendages:

Flashes of Your memory stoke my love
 Making me feel a throbbing in my bosom
 Every limb is filled with yearning passion,
 As if each appendage were a beating heart.

The reason Allah *the Almighty* has made the disbelievers taste this torment is because they had: ‘...So since you ignored the meeting on this Day of yours...’ (*as-Sajda*: 14) which Allah *the Almighty* had warned them of. They have no excuse; they cannot pretend to have been blissfully unaware like so many doe-eyed innocents. Given that Allah *the Almighty* had very much made clear the enormity of the terror of the Judgment, they really should have sat up and paid a little bit more attention. Conversely, when the believers witness the torment enveloping the deniers of the Truth, they will be that much happier to have been spared such a fate. The punishment for ignoring the inevitable meeting with Allah is that: ‘...We shall ignore you ...’ (*as-Sajda*: 14). For having thrown aside Allah’s Commands and for having been apathetic to His Warnings, He *the Almighty* will now abandon you – not out of forgetfulness, but as a deliberate punishment to expel you from the umbrella of Divine Mercy which used to shade everyone in the worldly life, both the good and the wicked. Nature gives everything it has to humanity – all of humanity, without any differentiation between the believers and the deniers of the Truth – as long as they play by her rules. In the Hereafter, on the other hand, Allah *the Almighty* will forsake the disbelievers from this mercy which they have proven themselves singularly unworthy of: ‘...taste the lasting suffering for

all you have done.’ (*as-Sajda*: 14) Although your rebellion against Allah *the Almighty* may only have lasted for a very brief moment in time, the torment which will overtake you now will be eternal and everlasting. A loss more grievous, a disaster more immense could not be imagined. It is very, very important that we correctly calculate the equation which computes the relationship between how much we are rewarded in the Hereafter and how much work we put in here on earth. The duration of the universe is already very short, and our own life span is that much more fleeting. Our life span in the Hereafter, on the other hand, is eternal. Even if the pleasures of this world could rival those of the next life – which they most certainly do not – the infinitely greater timeframe to enjoy them in would still load the scales in favour of Heaven. Furthermore, you can only experience pleasure in this world within the limited scope of your own mortal faculties, whereas in Heaven, you can experience the infinite pleasure afforded by Allah’s Infinite Powers. Similarly, the delights of this world might pass you by, whereas you will have plenty of time to enjoy the delights of paradise wherein you will abide eternally.

This is a deal which we need to think over real well. It certainly would not be too much for us to barter all the riches in the world to achieve what the Prophet once called ‘that most lucrative bargain.’ This imagery of bargaining for one’s eternal fate is one very much rooted in Quranic discourse. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘These are they who buy error for the right direction, so their bargain shall bring no gain, nor are they the followers of the right direction.’ (*al-Baqara*: 16) Allah *the Almighty* then says:

إِنَّمَا يُؤْمِنُ بِآيَاتِنَا الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِّرُوا بِهَا خَرُّوا سُجَّدًا
وَسَبِّحُوا بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ

The only people who truly believe in Our messages are those who, when they are reminded of them, bow down in worship, celebrate their Lord’s praises, and do not think themselves above this [15] (The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 15)

The Arabic word *Kharra* (To fall down) means ‘to tumble down’ or ‘to collapse’; this word also appears in Allah’s saying: ‘...so the roof fell down on them from above them...’ (*an-Nahl*: 26) and in His saying: ‘Say: Believe

in it or believe not; surely those who are given the knowledge before it fall down on their faces, making obeisance when it is recited to them. And they say: Glory be to our Lord! Most surely the promise of our Lord was to be fulfilled.’ (*al-Isra’*: 107-108) Thus, the meaning of ‘To fall down’ here is to involuntarily fall prostrate to the ground.

Derivatives of this word are mentioned whenever the root (*s-j-d*) (prostration) appears in the Quran, alluding to how this demonstration of submission to the Lord is second nature to the believer, as reaffirmed by the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘...fall down on their faces...’ (*al-Isra’*: 107), an act which represents the upmost humility, even more so than the regular prostration performed in the five daily prayers on the seven points of the human body, i.e. the two feet, the two knees, the two hands, and the face. This word is also mentioned with bowing (*Al-Ruku’*) in one verse of the Quran relating to Prophet Dawud (David); Allah *the Almighty* ‘...so he sought the protection of his Lord and he fell down bowing and turned time after time (to Him).’ (*Sad*: 24)

Elsewhere, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And they fall down on their faces weeping, and it adds to their humility.’ (*al-Isra’*: 109) The more they humble themselves, the more reverent they become. Because they yearn to carry out Allah’s Commandments, they completely and utterly submit themselves to Allah *the Almighty*. This in turn illuminates the words of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘The closest the servant approaches the Lord is when they are in prostration to Him; thus, when you are in prostration, supplicate to Allah as much as you can.’⁽¹⁾ Prostration means to place your face and forehead – those very symbols of our dignity and prestige – on the ground in submission to Allah *the Almighty*.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

(1) See Muslim, *Sahih*, Hadith no 482; Ahmad, *Al-Musnad*, Hadith no. 421, on the authority of Abu Hurayra.

تَجَافَى جُنُوبُهُمْ عَنِ الْمَضَاجِعِ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ خَوْفًا
وَطَمَعًا وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

Their sides shun their beds in order to pray to their Lord in fear and hope; they give to others some of what We have given them⁽¹⁾ [16] (The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 16)

‘To shun’ means ‘to part from’ when you part from someone or something, it can be a bittersweet mixture of yearning and pain, as when you bid adieu to your beloved. But the word ‘shun’ explicitly denotes an aversion to what you are leaving behind. In this context, this means that the believers’ flanks have no love lost for the snugness of their mattresses because they are plunging themselves into the greater and more lasting ecstasy of communing with the divine. When ‘Ali went to bury Fatima *Allah be Pleased with them* he stopped by the grave of Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* and said: ‘Peace be upon you, Messenger of Allah *the Almighty*! The departure of your friend has worn hard on me, my only consolation being that no loss after your loss can be too great. Since your soul poured forth between my neck and my breast and I laid you to rest in your grave, my nights have been sleepless and my sorrow unending. And so shall it be until Allah *the Almighty* transports me to the realm in which you currently abide. Your daughter can tell you herself how your community has violently set upon itself. All this has come to pass even though your memory still lingers with us, and even though not much time has elapsed since you took leave of our company.’

When ‘Ali was about to depart, he said: ‘I send you the greetings of peace to bid you adieu. If I must now go, then know that it is not because I have wearied of you or do not love you; and if I stay, then know that it is not because I doubt Allah’s promise to those of His servants who exercise patience.’ As for the

(1) Regarding the occasion surrounding the revelation of this verse, Al-Bazzar narrated that Bilal ibn Rabah said, ‘Once, while we were in a gathering, and some of the Companions of the Prophet were praying [continuously] from the time after sunset until nightfall, the verse: ‘Their sides shun their beds in order to pray to their Lord...’ (*as-Sajda*: 16) was revealed.” As-Suyuti relates this incident in his *Asbab An-Nuzul*, attributing the narration to Al-Bazzar, although he considers the chain of narration to be weak because of Al-Bazzar’s sheikh, ‘Abdullah ibn Shabib.

saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Their sides shun their beds...' (*as-Sajda*: 16), it means that they have an aversion to them, even though they are the greatest instrument of rest for the human being. When a person throbs with life, they have the strength and vigour to perform a myriad of tasks. Activity is a vital component of our existence. Through our strength we can walk around and pick things up, carry them, and put them down somewhere else. If we become tired from carrying things, we put them down, and then continue walking without our load. After walking makes us tired, we stop and stand in one place. When standing makes us tired, we sit down. We can conversely ask our friends to carry our load for us, but they might have trouble simply carrying their own weight, as we do. This fatigue arises from the weight of the body pushing on the feet. This is why, for instance, if the imam recites a long chapter in prayer, the congregants will switch their weight between one foot and the other. By contrast, sitting relaxes us because it distributes the body's weight over the greater surface area of the gluteus. When we become so fatigued that even sitting does not relieve us, we can lie on our side and stretch our whole body out on the ground so that our full weight is distributed over the entire surface area of the body, each limb having to carry no more than its own share. If you still feel tired after this, you can turn on your other side or onto your back; nevertheless, the only way to achieve complete rest is through immersing yourself in sleep. These various stages are known as the stages of muscular progression, where the state of sleep represents the most perfect form of rest given that, when we are in it, we do not feel any of the pain that may plague us during our waking hours. The believers pass through all these various stages of activity and rest in their lives until they arrive at death, the Great Sleep, after which they are resurrected and brought into Heaven, where they are granted the ultimate repose in the embrace of their Creator. The point of all this is that the bed represents the last stage in a multi-layered progression of fatigue. But despite the supreme comfort it symbolizes, the burning desire of the believers to stand before Allah *the Almighty* makes them shun this amenity. In another passage, Allah *the Almighty* similarly says about the believers that: 'They used to sleep but little in the night.' (*adh-Dhariyat*: 17) Allah *the Almighty* then says: '...pray to their Lord...' (*as-Sajda*: 16), that is, they supplicate their Lord even though their eyes are drooping from

exhaustion. Their prayers give them energy – even if they have not been answered yet – because the believers have entrusted their affairs to One Who is perfectly capable of taking care of them and because the joy of communing with the Lord in prayer makes them forget the pangs of sleep deprivation. The believers supplicate Allah *the Almighty*: ‘...in fear and hope...’ (*as-Sajda*: 16): in fear of their failure to fully live according to Allah’s *the Almighty* will and to exhibit an appropriate level of Allah *the Almighty* consciousness, and in hope of His forgiveness. Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘...they give to others some of what We have given them.’ (*as-Sajda*: 16) refers to paying the alms-tax. As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘...Their sides shun their beds...’ (*as-Sajda*: 16), it refers specifically to the performance of the ritual prayer, since the Quran often mentions these two pillars in conjunction with one another. Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘...they give to others some of what We have given them.’ (*as-Sajda*: 16) Allah *the Almighty* then says:

﴿١٧﴾ فَلَا تَعْلَمُ نَفْسٌ مَّا أُخْفِيَ لَهُم مِّن قُرَّةِ أَعْيُنٍ جَزَاءً بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

**No soul knows what joy is kept hidden in store for
them as a reward for what they have done [17]
(The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 17)**

Allah *the Almighty* has veiled the full secrets of His benefaction from us, giving us in this world only what we need. But when He *the Almighty* rewards His believing servants in Heaven, He does not reward them only with the finite blessings which their mortal vessels could handle, but with the possibilities which He knows, and which are commiserate with His own unlimited powers. We are incapable of articulating Allah’s powers because our human language is too limited; we cannot coin a term for something unless it corresponds to a pre-existing concept which we already comprehend. So as Allah *the Almighty* says in this regard: ‘No soul knows what joy is kept hidden in store for them...’ (*as-Sajda*: 17). The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* once said of paradise that, ‘In it are wonders which no eye has ever beheld, which no ear has ever heard, and which no human heart has ever conceived.’⁽¹⁾

(1) See Muslim, *Sahih*, no. 2824; Ahmad, *AL-Musnad*, no. 466/2; Abu Na‘im, *Hilyat AL-Awliya’*, no. 262/2 from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra.

Given that these things are utterly beyond our mortal experience, how can we possibly formulate words to describe them? Indeed, how are we even supposed to imagine them? We will be completely taken aback when we do finally encounter them – Allah *the Almighty* willing! Notice how, when Allah *the Almighty* discusses Heaven, He does not speak about it in literal terms, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘A likeness of the garden which the righteous are promised...’ (*ar-Ra’d*: 35) that is, what follows is not a 100% exact report of what paradise is like, but merely a metaphor. Since our language is incapable of capturing the reality of the Hereafter, Allah *the Almighty* gives us an approximate image to drive home the idea for us. When providing metaphors from our worldly surroundings, Allah *the Almighty* nevertheless makes sure to emphasize that, in paradise, these things are free of the deficiencies of their earthly counterparts. As Allah *the Almighty* says of the bliss of paradise: ‘a parable of the garden which those guarding (against evil) are promised: Therein are rivers of water that does not alter...’ (*Muhammad*: 15) in contrast to earthly water, which can become rancid if kept in storage too long. Similarly, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘...and rivers of milk the taste whereof does not change...’ (*Muhammad*: 15), the old Arabs hated the milk that soured during travel. Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘...and rivers of drink delicious to those who drink...’ (*Muhammad*: 15). The problem with worldly alcohol is that it shuts off the brain, on top of which its flavour is not that great. That is why those who do take up the bottle gulp it down all at once because the actual act of consuming spirits is not that enjoyable. I mean, ask yourself: have you ever really seen someone slowly sip wine to savour its flavour like they would a glass of tasty fruit juice? But Allah *the Almighty* describes the wine of Heaven as follows: ‘There shall be no trouble in it, nor shall they be exhausted therewith.’⁽¹⁾ (*as-Saffat*: 47)

Allah *the Almighty* then continues in this description of paradise: ‘...and rivers of honey clarified...’ (*Muhammad*: 15). While the honey of this world is often filled with small rocks and other gunk that get into it when it pours off

(1) (Anzafa) means ‘to completely finish off a beverage,’ just as it can refer to the drying up of a well. See Ibn Mandhur, *Lisan Al-‘Arab* – entry on (N-Z-F)]. Ad-Dahhak related that Ibn ‘Abbas once said, ‘Alcohol leads to four things: drunkenness, a hangover, puke, and piss The wine of Heaven, on the other hand, has been described by Allah *the Almighty* as being free of these side effects.’ See Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir*, 7/4.

the beehive, the honey of Heaven will be purified of this grit. No matter how much luxurious wealth we might enjoy here on earth, no one is rich enough to construct a river of wine, or milk, or honey. Furthermore, these heavenly rivers are not bound by any shores, and indeed interlace with one another without their contents mixing together. This is from Allah's unbounded power. The point is that when Allah *the Almighty* describes for us the bliss of Heaven, He is only conveying to us a metaphorical image, not the reality of Heaven; but even so, He still makes sure to disassociate these metaphors from the deficiencies inherent in their worldly analogues. In the same vein, the old Arabs used to enjoy Lote trees because of the shade they afford and their tasty fruit. The proverbial fly in the soup, however, was that, in order to obtain its fruits, they would have to risk tearing their flesh against the tree's fierce thorns. Hence, Allah *the Almighty* says that the believers in Heaven shall abide: 'Amid thornless lote-trees.'⁽¹⁾ (*al-Waqi'a*: 28) so that nothing will spoil their pleasure. Similarly, when Allah *the Almighty* speaks of the *houris* of paradise, He notes how: 'Man has not touched them before them or jinni.' (*ar-Rahman*: 74) This is due to reassure the male believers that their companions' virginity – that most important component of the feminine beauty for a man – has not been tainted. Regarding all of these things, Allah *the Almighty* says that: 'No soul knows what joy is kept hidden in store for them...' (*as-Sajda*: 17) The word blissful delights (*qurraṭ a'yun*) literally means 'tranquillity of the eyes.' From this root is derived the verb to settle (*qarra/ istaqarra*) because, when you want to settle down in a certain neighbourhood or buy an apartment, you ask about the facilities that are available, the utilities, and the location, etc., since you would not settle down in a certain place unless you find it comfortable and equipped with the provisions you need. One of the greatest places of true tranquillity is, of course, the countryside, where we can still commune with our primordial nature, unsullied by the artificiality and gaudiness of urban civilization. Everyone feels the tug to get in touch with their inner nature; no matter how much we advance materially, no matter how many creature comforts we may possess, no matter that we may inhabit buildings that bore

(1) Lote tree (*As-Sidr*) refers to the Christ's-thorn, of which there are two kinds: a wild variant whose fruit is inedible, and a variant which grows in water, whose fruit is yellow and bitter. See Ibn Mandhur, *Lissan Al-'Arab* – entry on (*s-d-r*).

through the very sky, at some point we all feel compelled to flee back into nature's embrace. Because it is only in the countryside that we can find rest and tranquillity (*qurra*), we make a weekend retreat there from time to time to escape the cacophony of the city. Going back to the term (*qurra* a 'yun): this means that the eye settles (*tastaqirr*) on something and no longer roams around looking for anything else – i.e., the eye is 'delighted' by this object, finding in it all sort of pleasure. From this we have the two expressions 'Their eye is full' – meaning that they need no more visual stimulation – and 'Their eye is empty' – meaning that their eye is not satisfied by what it beholds, wandering around looking for something to fill its craving.

In the paradise, people will be content with the bliss they will be provided with; they will thus not aspire for anything else but living eternally in it.

In this vein, Allah tells His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: '...and do not gaze longingly at what We have given some of them to enjoy, the finery of this present life: We test them through this ...' (*Ta Ha*: 131).

If someone's eyes are 'empty', their eyeballs will impatiently move from side to side searching for their aspirations and needs, whereas if their eyes are 'full', they will focus on what is at their hands.

Another meaning which is derived from the root *qarr* is *al-qurr* (severe cold), which can act as a figure of speech for happiness. A 'cool eye' is a content one, whereas a 'hot eye' is one that feels painful and sad.

Qurur al-A'ayn can also be used to refer to the paralysis of the eye due to blindness or some other medical condition. A woman once entered the court of the caliph and called out: '*Aqarr Allah 'aynak* (May Allah still your eye), and complete His blessing on you.' All the attendants in the presence of the caliph thought that she was sending her benediction to the ruler, but the caliph was the only one who understood her real intent: 'Actually, she means, "May Allah still your eye so that it becomes paralysed, and may He complete your blessing so that it is terminated"' because there is nothing after perfection but decrease.

Allah *the Almighty* then explains that He would give these blessings to His believing servants '...as a reward for what they have done.' (*as-Sajda*: 17) This passage has prompted controversy between scholars. A group of them

claim that the believers will be admitted into paradise as a result of their good deeds, as noted by this verse. In other words, they will enter the paradise because of Allah's Justice, and not His Grace. Another group of scholars yet disagree with this opinion, claiming that the believers will enter the paradise only by the Lord's Grace, as the Quran says elsewhere: 'Say [Prophet], In Allah's Grace and Mercy let them rejoice: these are better than all they accumulate.' (*Yunus*: 58)

Furthermore, they cite in support of their opinion the following Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in which he said: 'None amongst you can get into Paradise by virtue of his deeds alone. They said: Allah's Messenger, not even you? Thereupon he said: Not even I, but that Allah should wrap me in His Mercy.'⁽¹⁾

When the debate has been intense, the two groups tried to reconcile their views, so they articulated the following compromise position: 'By the time we become old enough to be morally accountable, Allah has already given us the best of His Blessings. Before we are even born, He sets up the conditions necessary for our survival, and then lets us bask in these blessings without asking us to do anything until we reach puberty at which we become spiritually accountable for our actions.' Thus, it is at this particular age that we start practicing our religious commitments. At that point, we should now that our duty to obey Allah stems from our obligation to recognise all the wonderful gifts He has already bestowed on us. Hence, our reward in the Hereafter is not for our deeds, but rather purely out of Allah's Grace.

The point is that when we fulfil our religious obligations, we are basically paying Allah back for His previous favours to us, which means that the delights of Heaven are really an extra gift from Him *Glorified is He*. Allah graces us both in our earlier life and in our later, otherworldly life.

Not only that, but when Allah *the Almighty* lays down rules for us, that in fact is viewed as a favour to us. For whenever we do good, we are rewarded at least tenfold for it, and perhaps exponentially more. We are the servants of Allah *the Almighty*; thus it is His Right to give us whatever He wants, just as it is His Right to hold back from us.

(1) See *Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 6463; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2816.*

Some Sufi Islamic scholars claim that since Allah has given us His Best, we are obliged to repay Him by giving Him our best; this meaning is deduced from the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘Shall the reward of good be anything but good?’ (*ar-Rahman*: 60) And when we give Allah our best, He in turn rewards us with His Best, which in turn prompts us to give Him our best, and so on forever.

Allah *the Almighty* then says⁽¹⁾:

أَفَمَنْ كَانَ مُؤْمِنًا كَمَنْ كَانَ فَاسِقًا لَا يَسْتَوُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

**So, is someone who believes equal to someone
who defies God? No, they are not equal [18]
(The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 18)**

Given that the words ‘sinner’ and ‘believer’ are used in the singular, we would have expected the phrase ‘...they are not equal’ (*as-Sajda*: 18) to use the dual case. Whereas English only has a singular and plural case for its verbs and nouns, Arabic also has a dual case to indicate exactly two subjects. Here, though, the plural is used. And, as we mentioned before, the relative pronouns *man* (who) and *ma* (what)– which can be singular, dual, plural, masculine or feminine – sometimes conform to the outward grammatical form they refer to, and sometimes the implied form.

As for the saying of Allah: ‘So, is someone who believes equal to someone who defies Allah? ...’ (*as-Sajda*: 18), it means that even though the Quran uses the singular, it refers to the plural, each word representing a class of people, and not a specific individual – and accordingly, the relative pronoun *man* (who) is treated as a plural ‘...No, they are not equal.’ (*as-Sajda*: 18)

(1) *As-Syutui said in his book that the occasion which prompted the revelation of this verse is as follows: Al-Wahhidi and Ibn ‘Asakir quote a narration from Sa’id ibn Jubayr who related from Ibn ‘Abbas that Al-Walid ibn ‘Uqba ibn Abu Ma’it once challenged ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb Allah be pleased with him saying: ‘My sword tip is more piercing than yours, my tongue broader than yours and I am more generous to the soldiers,’ whereupon ‘Ali responded, ‘Given that you’ are nothing more than a godless sinner, why do you not just shut up?’ upon which the verse ‘So, is someone who believes equal to someone who defies Allah? No, they are not equal.’ (as-Sajda: 18) was revealed.” See As-Suyuti, Asbab An-Nuzul. p.136.*

Alternatively, the Quran could in fact be referring to two individuals, with the intent of emphasising the general import of this comparison, and not the particulars; thus, although it commences by talking about a specific believer and a specific denier of the Truth, it ends up with the general rule that these two categories of people ‘...are not equal!’ (*as-Sajda*: 18) Indeed, it is an axiom of Islamic Law that the precepts of the Quran are deduced from the general import of the text and not the historical particulars which inform the text⁽¹⁾.

Some people say that this verse was revealed regarding Al-Walid ibn ‘Uqba ibn Abi Ma‘it⁽²⁾ when he challenged ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with them* saying: ‘I am stronger than you, my powers of perseverance are greater than you, both my tongue and my sword tip are sharper than yours, my heart is braver than yours, and I am more generous than you,’ but ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* shot back, ‘Well, you are just some godless sinner, which means that all your talents are worthless, so why do you not just shut up?’ meaning that even if you are in fact everything you claim to be, it does not matter because you have squandered all of your good qualities in the pursuit of sin and falsehood.

Thus, the verse combines the particularity of the incident referred to in the saying of Allah ‘So, is someone who believes equal to someone who defies Allah?’ (*as-Sajda*: 18) with the generality of the rule that ‘...No, they are not equal.’ (*as-Sajda*: 18)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*, ‘...No, they are not equal.’ (*as-Sajda*: 18) is the response to the question ‘So, is someone who believes equal to someone who defies Allah?’ (*as-Sajda*: 18) Instead of simply declaring that ‘one who believes definitely cannot be compared to one who is a profligate sinner,’ the Quran uses this rhetorical style to force the godless sinners to admit the Truth themselves.

For instance, if you say to your friend, ‘You were not there for me in my greatest hour of need,’ you thus leave him manoeuvring space to issue a denial: ‘No, no, I was with you on such-and-such a day.’ By making a simple declarative statement, you make it possible for someone to dispute

(1) See Manna‘ Al-Qattan, *Mabahith fi ‘Ulum Al-Quran*, Wahba Publishing House: 1988; p. 80.

(2) The story of ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* with Al-Walid ibn ‘Uqba ibn Abu Ma‘it

your claim. On the other hand, if you use a question, you can force them into a corner: 'Did I not give you my help on such-and-such a date?' If you know for certain what the answer is, you can force them to concede your point and make them bear witness against themselves.

With the same logic in mind, Allah *the Almighty* poses the following question: 'So, is someone who believes equal to someone who defies Allah?' (*as-Sajda*: 18) There is no other way for us to answer except to reaffirm, 'No, indeed, a believer can in no way be compared to a godless sinner.'

Since the believers and wicked transgressors are not equal in their spiritual worth, each group must be rewarded with a fate commiserate with their deeds, which is why Allah *the Almighty* says afterwards:

أَمَّا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فَلَهُمْ جَنَّاتُ الْمَأْوَىٰ
نُزُلًا بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

Those who believe and do good deeds will have Gardens awaiting them as their home and as a reward for what they have done [19] (The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 19)

This verse further reaffirms that although the word 'believer' in the previous verse is presented in the singular, it is meant to refer to all the believers, and therefore should be understood as a plural: 'Those who believe and do good deeds...' (*as-Sajda*: 19). This general statement which refers to a 'believer' once again shows how 'believer' is used in this context to refer to all the believers. Similarly, in the chapter of *al-'Asr*, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'By the declining day, man is [deep] in loss' (*al-'Asr*: 1-2).

Even though *al-Insan* (the man) is singular, it is obviously referring to the generic category of human beings, since a plural noun is subsequently excluded from the general statement regarding this man; Allah says: '...except for those who believe, do good deeds...' (*al-'Asr*: 3). The point is that a singular noun can be used to refer to a class of things.

Similarly, in this passage under study, Allah *the Almighty* switches between the singular noun 'believer' and the plural one 'Those who believe...' (*as-Sajda*: 19), just as He switches between the singular noun 'one who is

sinner' and the plural construct 'As for those who defy Allah...' (*as-Sajda*: 20). Both nouns refer to two contrasting classes of people, each of which will be driven to a different fate as befitting their spiritual state.

Back to the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Those who believe and do good deeds will have Gardens awaiting them as their home...' (*as-Sajda*: 19); the word *ma'wa* here means a 'retreat' or a 'sanctuary', as Allah *the Almighty* says regarding 'Isa (Jesus) and Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon them*: '...We gave them shelter on a peaceful hillside with flowing water' (*al-Mu'minun*: 50) meaning that Allah brought them to a place where they could settle down and enjoy everything they needed.

Similarly, the son of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* says in the chapter of *Hud* to his father: '...I will seek refuge on a mountain to save me from the water...' (*Hud*: 43). But his father anxiously warns him that '...Today there is no refuge from Allah's Command except for those on whom He has mercy...' (*Hud*: 43).

Notice the tender compassion that Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* felt towards his son even though the latter was a sinner; the Quran mentions that Noah said to Allah: '...My Lord, my son was one of my family...' (*Hud*: 45), but Allah corrected him, saying: '...he was not one of your family, What he did was not right...' (*Hud*: 46).

The point is that our true family should not be determined by blood, but rather by our connection through faith, which is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* once said of Salman Al-Farisi *Allah be pleased with him* who was not even from the Arabs: 'Salman is a member of the Prophetic household.'⁽¹⁾

Although, as in the case of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* parents cannot help their disbelieving children in the Hereafter, they can benefit their believing progeny – and this is not confined to the Prophets but for all people. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We unite the believers with their offspring who

(1) See *Al-Bayhaqi, Dala'il An-Nubuwwa*, 418/3; see also *Al-Hakim, Al-Mustadrak*, 598/3; *Adh-Dhahabi* considered the chain of narration of this Hadith to be weak because of *Kuthayr ibn 'Abdullah*.

followed them in faith— We do not deny them any of the rewards for their deeds...' (*at-Tur*: 21).

It is an honour for parents to have their children admitted into the paradise through their parents' faith and good works. If children pass away before reaching puberty when they would have become morally accountable for their actions, then of course they will be reunited with their parents in the Heaven. Indeed, their station will be even greater than their parents because those who die as young children are not assigned a certain position in the paradise, but rather, they are roaming freely in it.

It is like when you take your kid to a friend's house; while you are sitting in the living room talking with the adults, your child is running all around the house, getting into every nook and cranny. This is why children are called the fowls of Heaven⁽¹⁾.

At this point, you might bring up a related issue, namely; if our fate is determined by our own deeds, if – as the Egyptians say – everyone is responsible for his actions and we cannot benefit from other people's good deeds, then why do we bother praying for the dead? After all, they did not make that prayer him/herself. This means that they will either benefit from a good deed someone did on their behalf, or else the prayers for them are meaningless – and Allah forbid that anything in Islam would be meaningless!

Here, we should ask the following question, 'Do you pray for every single person who dies, whether he is a believer or a disbeliever? No, of course, we only pray for our fellow believers. Thus, our prayers are a direct consequence of their faith, and can subsequently be counted as one of their own deeds; after all, if they had not accepted faith, we would not have prayed for them.

Going back to the word *ma'wa* (place of rest); we stress that the paradise is a sanctuary for the believers because it shields them from the horrors of the hellfire: '...as a reward for what they have done...' (*as-Sajda*: 19), that is, as a reward for their righteous deeds. The word *nuzul* refers to lodgings prepared for any guests that might drop in at any time; this word can also be used in Arabic to refer to hotels. And if you think our four-star hotels are

(1) See *Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2635 and Ahmad, Musnad, p. 510, 477/2.*

luxurious, imagine then the lodgings that Allah has prepared for the righteous in the paradise!

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فَسَقُوا فَمَأْوَاهُمُ النَّارُ كُلَّمَا أَرَادُوا أَنْ يَخْرُجُوا مِنْهَا أُعِيدُوا فِيهَا وَقِيلَ لَهُمْ ذُوقُوا عَذَابَ النَّارِ الَّتِي كُنتُمْ بِهِ تَكْذِبُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾

**As for those who defy God, their home will be the Fire.
Whenever they try to escape it, they will be driven back into
it, and they will be told, ‘Taste the torment of the Fire, which
you persistently denied’ [20] (The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 20)**

The Arabic phrase *alladhin fasaqu* (those who stray) is derived from the verb *fasaqa* which means ‘to stray’, ‘separate’, or ‘deviate’, a meaning which is clear in the saying of the Arabs, ‘The date became separated (*fasaqat*) from its peel.’ Thus, ‘to commit *fusuq* (iniquity) is an abbreviation for *fasaqa* (to deviate) from Allah’s Commands’. The punishment prepared by Allah for these people will be the fire; Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘...their home will be the Fire...’ (*as-Sajda*: 20). As we discussed above, a *ma’wa* refers to a sanctuary where you are protected from all sorts of evil. But how can the blazing inferno of hellfire be described as a sanctuary here?!

Commenting on this point, scholars say that although *ma’wa* usually refers to a place where we like to spend time in, the disbelievers are forced against their will to check into this hotel of fire. That is, this word is used sarcastically to mock at them, just as the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘Give news of agonising torment.’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 21)

Normally, of course, you are only supposed to give ‘glad tidings’ for good news. As a matter of fact, these statements which are laden with irony are mentioned so many times in the Quran. For example, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Taste this, you powerful, respected man!’ (*ad-Dukhan*: 49)

This rhetorical style which excoriates the deniers of Truth is very common in the Quran.

Allah *the Almighty* then depicts for us the utter despondency of the inhabitants of the Hell. He *Glorified is He* says: ‘...Whenever they try to escape it, they will be driven back into it...’ (*as-Sajda*: 20), or as He *the Almighty* says elsewhere in the Quran: ‘They will cry, ‘Malik, if only your Lord would finish us off,’ but he will answer, ‘No! You are here to stay.’ (*az-Zukhruf*: 77) They have no glimmer of hope of ever escaping their fate; indeed, they are denied even the morbid hope of an eventual death to spare them this agony. Whenever they try to come out, the angel guarding hell makes sure to thrust them back into the blazing fire telling them, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Taste the torment of the Fire, which you persistently denied.’ (*as-Sajda*: 20)

This ‘tasting’ will engulf the tongue and then spread to each limb until every particle of their being will be forced to savour the agony of the flame as punishment for their refusal to acknowledge their inevitable return to their Creator.

But not only are the godless sinners punished in the Hereafter, they are also given a taste of their punishment here in this world. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَنُذِيقَنَّهُمْ مِنَ الْعَذَابِ الْأَدْنَىٰ دُونَ الْعَذَابِ الْأَكْبَرِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

We shall certainly make them taste a nearer torment [in this life] prior to the greater torment, so that perhaps they may return [to the right path] [21] (The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 21)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘...a nearer torment [in this life]...’ (*as-Sajda*: 21) refers to this world; as for His saying, ‘...prior to the greater torment...’ (*as-Sajda*: 21), it refers to the punishment that they will experience in the Hereafter. This punishment which afflicts them here on earth is actually a blessing from Allah, because it is meant to prompt them ‘...so that perhaps they may return [to the right path]...’ (*as-Sajda*: 21). More specifically, this lesser punishment refers to the humiliation which the believers visit upon the sinners. In this vein, did ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ud *Allah be pleased with him*⁽¹⁾,

(1) ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ud ibn Ghafil Al-Hudhali *Allah be pleased with him* was one of the greatest Companions, one of the most intelligent, and one of the closest to Prophet=

who was known for being slight⁽¹⁾ not flung Abu Jahl to the ground in one of the Muslim battles against the pagans, putting his foot on the latter's neck. History tells us that Abu Jahl looked up at 'Abdullah and sardonically remarked, 'You have come a long way, shepherd boy.'⁽²⁾

The Quran describes the chastisement of the Hereafter as 'that supreme suffering,' because it will be utterly encompassing and inescapable.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '...so that perhaps they may return [to the right path]...' (*as-Sajda*: 21), it expresses the hope that they, i.e. the wrongdoers will return to the fold of faith. As we have noted before, when the preposition *la'alla* (so that...might) is used to refer to Allah *the Almighty* it expresses a hope that will definitely be realised; yet when it refers to a human being possessed of free will, it expresses a hope that may or may not materialise. Thus, some people repent, while others do not.

Allah *the Almighty* says:

Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him. He was the first to publicly recite the Quran in Mecca. He was vertically-challenged to the point where, when sitting, he was almost hidden by the bodies of those around him. After the passing of Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him he was put in charge of the treasury in Kufa. He later moved to Medina during the Caliphate of 'Uthman Allah be pleased with him where he died at about sixty years.

The story of 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud Allah be pleased with him and the killing of Abu Jahl.

- (1) *In At-Tabaqat Al-Kubra, Ibn Sa'd said, 'Ubayd Allah ibn 'Abdullah ibn 'Utba related that 'Ibn Mas'ud was short and skinny.' Ibrahim At-Taymi narrated, 'Once when Ibn Mas'ud climbed a tree, some people started laughing at him for having such skinny legs. But Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him intervened, 'Why are you laughing at his legs? His legs are weightier in the Scales of Allah than Mount Uhud.' See Ibn Sa'd, At-Tabaqat Al-Kubra, 3/143.*
- (2) *In As-Sira An-Nabawiyya, Ibn Hisham said, 'This took place at the battle of Badr. Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him had ordered the Companions to search for Abu Jahl among the corpses strewn out on the battlefield. 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud Allah be pleased with him came across him as he was about to give up the ghost. He put his foot on Abu Jahl's neck, saying to him: "Has the Lord not disgraced you, enemy of Allah?" Abu Jahl responded, "You' have come a long way, shepherd boy," at which point 'Abdullah chopped his head off. See Ibn Hisham, As-Sira An-Nabawiyya, 2/ 276, 277.*

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ ذُكِّرَ بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِ ثُمَّ أَعْرَضَ عَنْهَا
إِنَّا مِنَ الْمُجْرِمِينَ مُنْقِمُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

**Who does more wrong than someone who, when
messages from his Lord are recited to him, turns
away from them? We shall inflict retribution on
the guilty [22] (The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 22)**

Allah *the Almighty* once again poses a question to force us to reaffirm a certain point. He is basically saying, ‘My servants, tell me the truth: is there anyone more wicked and sinful than someone who hears My Messages and then ignores them?’

If we analyse this logically, then we have to admit that there is no one more wicked or unjust than such a person who denies the Message of Allah. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* once again presents this idea as a rhetorical question to prompt us to concede this point.

He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Who does more wrong than someone who, when messages from his Lord are recited to him, turns away from them?’ (*as-Sajda*: 22), meaning that the implication being that all of Allah’s Messages to us are nothing more than a reminder of that primordial pact of faith which the Lord took from us when He says: ‘...He said, ‘Am I not your Lord?...’ (*al-A‘raf*: 172) As we mentioned before, we all have given this vow to Allah *the Almighty* which is why we must make sure to foster the spiritual illuminations of this part of our soul by nourishing it with what is religiously permitted and by exercising it with the obedience of Allah.

This point is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘...by the soul and how He formed it, and inspired it [to know] its own rebellion and piety! The one who purifies his soul succeeds, and the one who corrupts it fails.’ (*ash-Shams*: 7-10)

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ فَلَا تَكُنْ فِي مِرْيَةٍ
مِّنْ لِّقَائِهِ وَجَعَلْنَاهُ هُدًى لِّبَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ

**We gave Moses the Scripture – so [Muhammad]
do not doubt that you are receiving it – and We
made it a guide for the Children of Israel [23]
(The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 23)**

Different Prophets have been granted different things: some have only been given a law, some only a miracle, while others have been given both. Similarly, there are Prophets who have been given a Scripture meant only for a specific time and place, while others have been given a Scripture valid for everyone until the end of time.

The word *al-kitab* (revelation) in this verse literally means ‘book’ or ‘scripture,’ referring specifically to the Torah. Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘...so [Muhammad] do not doubt that you are receiving it...’ (*as-Sajda*: 23). The pronoun here is ambiguous: does it refer to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* or to the Torah? If the former, then the verse is announcing that Allah will bring together Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who was alive during the revelation of this verse, and Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* who was not. The only way that this interpretation could be accepted would be if the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on the miraculous journey from Mecca to Jerusalem (*Al-Isra*) and the subsequent Ascension to the Heaven where he related his meeting with Musa was an authentic historical incident⁽¹⁾.

There is a relevant verse from another chapter which we should take a moment to carefully consider and contemplate. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Ask the Prophets We sent before you: ‘Did We ever appoint any gods to be

(1) In his *Tafsir*, Imam Ibn Kathir said, ‘Ibn ‘Abbas related that Prophet Muhammad Allah’s *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘The night I was [miraculously] transported to Jerusalem, I saw Moses, the son of ‘Imran Allah’s *peace be upon him*. He was tall, with curly hair, and of dark brown complexion, as if he were from the tribe of Shanaw’a. I also saw ‘Isa (Jesus) Allah’s *peace be upon him*; he was of medium built, with a fair-ruddy complexion and lank hair.’ See Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Al-Qur’an Al-‘Azhim*, 463/3.

worshipped besides the Lord of Mercy?' (*az-Zukhruf*: 45) In other words, Allah *the Almighty* is commanding Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask the other Messengers, which clearly indicates that there will be a time when they will actually meet, whereas (*as-Sajda*: 23) alludes to the meeting between Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Musa *peace be upon him*; the aforementioned verse of the chapter of *al-Anbiya'*, (*az-Zukhruf*: 45) refers to a meeting between him *peace and blessings be upon him* and all the other Messengers and Prophets⁽¹⁾. Thus, if we adopt the interpretation that (*as-Sajda*: 23) refers to the meeting that will take place between Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Musa *peace be upon him* we need to accept the authenticity of the Hadith which relates Prophet Muhammad's miraculous journey to Jerusalem and then to Heaven (*al-Isra' wa al-Mi'raj*) where he *peace and blessings be upon him* had met with all the previous Messengers and Prophets, led them in prayer and talked to them.

Alternatively, we could understand the verse in question as referring to the Torah. Yet, since the Torah had been distorted and altered with over the centuries, this verse would then mean that sincere Jews who know the original Torah, such as 'Abdullah ibn Salam *Allah be pleased with him* will confide its true teachings to you. Of such people, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...There are some among the people of the Book who are upright, who recite Allah's Revelations during the night, who bow down in worship.' (*Al-Imran*: 113)

After all, did 'Abdullah ibn Salam⁽²⁾ not confront his Jewish brethren, saying to them, 'How can you call Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a liar and you used to pray for him to come and grant you victory against those who disbelieved? You used to tell the pagans, 'The time is fast approaching when a Prophet will come, under whose leadership we will slaughter you as

(1) See Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azim*, 4/129.

(2) In his book, Imam Al-Zirikli said, 'Abdullah ibn Salam ibn Al-Harith Abu Yusuf the Israelite converted to Islam with the arrival of Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* to Medina. He was present with 'Umar at the conquest of Jerusalem and Al-Jabiyya, but when the civil war broke out between 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* and Mu'awiyya *Allah be pleased with him* he took a wooden sword and forsook the fighting. He settled in Medina until his death in 42 A.H.' See Al-Zirikli, *Al-'Alam*. 4/90.

uncompromisingly as the people of ‘Ad and Iram⁽¹⁾ were slaughtered.’ The persecution which you suffered in the Diaspora has led you to come to Yathrib to await the arrival of this last Prophet. So, after all this, how can you now call him a liar?!’

The Quran says about them: ‘When a Scripture came to them from Allah confirming what they already had, and when they had been praying for victory against the disbelievers, even when there came to them something they knew [to be true], they disbelieved in it...’ (*al-Baqara*: 89).

It is narrated⁽²⁾ that when ‘Abdullah ibn Salam wanted to believe in Allah and Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* he came to Prophet Muhammad and said, ‘Messenger of Allah, the Jews are mendacious; if they know that I have converted, they will falsely slander me. Therefore, you should ask them what their opinion of me is before I announce my conversion.’ When the Jews had gathered before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he asked them what they thought of Ibn Salam. ‘A gentleman and a scholar, from a family of gentlemen and scholars!’ they replied. But when he came out and said, ‘I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah,’ they changed their earlier assessment: ‘He is scoundrel, from a family of scoundrels.’ ‘Abdullah then turned to Prophet Muhammad and said: ‘Did I not tell you that they are a mendacious people?’⁽³⁾

As for the saying of Allah: ‘...We made it a guide for the Children of Israel.’ (*as-Sajda*: 23), it means that Allah *the Almighty* made the Scripture of the Torah a source of guidance. This also reaffirms that there are Jews who are rightly guided: Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...There are some among the

(1) In his *Tafsir*, Imam ibn Kathir said, ‘Several elders from the Ansar have related, ‘During the pre-Islamic days, we, the pagan idolaters, had for a long time gained the upper hand over the Jews, who were followers of a monotheistic Scripture. So, they used to say to us, “A Prophet shall be sent to us shortly, for his time has come. Under his leadership, we shall slaughter you as uncompromisingly as ‘Ad and Iram were slaughtered.” But when Allah the Almighty finally sent His Prophet who is from Quraysh, we were the ones who followed him, while the Jews rejected him.’ See Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Al-Quran Al-‘Azhim*, 1/124.

(2) The story of ‘Abdullah ibn Salam’s conversion to Islam.

(3) See *Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3938; and Ahmad, Musnad, vol. 3, P.108, 271, 272.*

people of the Book who are upright, who recite Allah's Revelations during the night, who bow down in worship.' (*Al- 'Imran*: 113)

Allah says:

وَجَعَلْنَا مِنْهُمْ أَيْمَةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا لَمَّا صَبَرُوا وَكَانُوا بِآيَاتِنَا يُوقِنُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

When they became steadfast and believed firmly in Our messages, We raised leaders among them, guiding them according to Our command [24] (The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 24)

Their being 'leaders' or 'imams' here does not refer to their temporal power from their own inherent strength, but rather to the leadership of moral authority granted to them by Allah, which is why He *the Almighty* stresses that they as Allah says: '...guiding them according to Our Command' (*as-Sajda*: 24) since whatever they excelled in was only through the Divine Guidance.

In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* says in the chapter of *al-Anbiya*: 'We made all of them leaders, guiding others by Our Command, and We inspired them to do good works, to keep up the prayer, and to give alms: they were Our true worshippers.' (*al-Anbiya*: 73)

As for the Arabic word *Alaiqan* (sure faith), it means an unshakeable conviction which your mind no longer debates back and forth, but which has become axiomatic, firmly embedded in your soul.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ يَفْصِلُ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ فِيمَا كَانُوا فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

[Prophet], it is your Lord who will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning their differences [25] (The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 25)

The first part of the verse reads, '...it is your Lord who will judge between them...' (*as-Sajda*: 25). Note that Allah *the Almighty* has used the pronoun 'who' for emphasis and to indicate that absolutely no one beside Allah will sit in judgment on the Last Day; a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '...Who has control today? Allah, the One, the All Powerful' (*Ghafir*: 16).

Again, the use of the pronoun is meant to clear up any doubt about that none, but Allah *the Almighty* will be sitting in judgment on that Day of Resurrection.

Note the use of this pronoun in question in the following verses of the Quran. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: ‘They are my enemies; not so the Lord of the Worlds, Who created me. It is He Who guides me; He Who gives me food and drink; He Who cures me when I am ill; He Who will make me die and then give me life again.’ (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 77-81)

Again, the use of this pronoun in question is meant to indicate the exclusivity of Allah being the source of our guidance, food, drink, good health, etc. However, someone may claim that he has the ability to do so. Note also how the pronoun is not used when referring to Allah’s Power over life and death, so no one can claim to have the ability to do so; since no one would dare claim such a prerogative.

Back to the verse in question: given that Allah *the Almighty* has appointed certain angels to run the affairs of the universe, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Each person has guardian angels before him and behind, watching over him by Allah’s Command...’ (*ar-Ra'd*: 11). That verse means that the certain angels are appointed by Allah will abide by His Command. Yet, some people might be led to think that these angels will play a role in serving judgment among mankind, since after all they carry out so many other important tasks on Allah’s behalf here on earth.

Notice also that Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘It is your Lord...’ and He *the Almighty* doesn’t say, ‘Verily, it is Allah...’ which means that He *the Almighty* by this verse asserts His *Rububiyya* (Lordship). By using this Attribute of Lordship in this context, He *the Almighty* wants to assure people that none will be wronged on that Day because He *Glorified is He* will be the One Who judged people. Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying, ‘...concerning their differences...’ (*as-Sajda*: 25) to indicate that Judgment is only rendered for disputes which require the review of a judge.

Allah says:

أَوَلَمْ يَهْدِ لَهُمْ كَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ مِنَ الْقُرُونِ يَمْشُونَ
 فِي مَسْكِنِهِمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ أَفَلَا يَسْمَعُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

Is it not a lesson for them [to see] how many generations We destroyed before them, in whose homes they now walk? There truly are signs in this – do they not hear? [26] (The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 26)

Allah *the Almighty* has spoken about the Message with which He sent His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to call people to a more sublime faith in Allah *the Almighty* the One Who has no partner. He *the Almighty* then tells that people will have another meeting with Him *Glorified is He* after the end of the world when people will be admitted either to the paradise or to the Hell.

When Allah *the Almighty* displays His signs in the world, He does so to establish that He is the One Who creates these wonders. He did not create them for our idle amusement, but to urge us to carefully reflect upon them. If Allah had wanted to deceive us, He certainly would not have been trying to awaken our souls or telling us to deeply ponder over His Revelation.

Furthermore, if He *the Almighty* had not been confident that we could reach enlightenment through this contemplation, He would not have bothered alerting us to His signs in the first place. Similarly, a salesperson who is confident in the quality of his wares will not hesitate to have you closely inspect them because he knows that you will be impressed.

On the other hand, a salesperson who is hawking defective products will try to dupe you and gyp you off. For instance, if you want new shoes, but the pair you try on is too tight, the salesperson might disingenuously claim that they will break in after you have walked in them for a while, or conversely, if they are too wide, they will try to make you think that they are a good fit. These sorts of tricks are painfully obvious.

But while a slippery merchant will try to veil the truth from your probing intellect, Allah *the Almighty* Himself forcefully pushes us to think and reflect, repeatedly saying in the Quran: ‘will they not listen?’, ‘will they not use their

reason?’, and ‘will they not ponder this Quran?’ It is very much in the interest of Islam that we should seek to seriously intellectually analyse it. Conversely, when you speak to members of certain other religions, they might say, ‘Do not try to rationally analyse this issue’ because they know too well that if you did, you would not be able to accept it. But Allah *the Almighty* does not want to give us any excuse for not embracing Islam after we hear about it. And indeed, the original, pristine message of this religion has been accurately and clearly conveyed. Such are the signs of Allah in the world.

In order to establish the truthfulness of His Prophets, Allah *the Almighty* grants them miracles—contrary to the laws of the universe—in the field which their people are known for excelling in magic, medicine, etc., so that their people will have no excuse to not believe in the Divine Revelation. Allah then reveals His Commandments and explains that in order for us to lead wholesome lives we need to implement the Divine Way of Guidance. So, when we turn away from His Guidance, defects come on the scene, a matter which clearly indicates that the Laws of Allah in this regard had been violated.

Allah *the Almighty* then makes clear that He has sent many Prophets since Adam *peace be upon him*. We, humans, who are supposed to be Allah’s successors on earth, often lose sight of our true mission because of how easily our immersion in the trappings of this world overwhelms our every thought. It is all too human of us to ignore everything that does not serve our immediate needs. This is also why people often forget what they owe others while remembering quite well what others owe them.

It is as if Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘you have no more excuses. Allah has strewn out His clear signs everywhere for us to read; we cannot plead ignorance. Indeed, even though there are a lot of people who deny the Truth, no one has ever gone so far as to claim that they themselves created the sun or the moon, or that they are the ones who cause the wind to move through the land, or the plants to sprout up, or the rain to cascade from the sky.

Allah *the Almighty* also warns us to never forget that we are nothing more than His successors on the earth and that we are neither self-created nor self-perpetuating. The moment we lose sight of this, Allah will abandon us to our own faculties, and we will soon enough expire. This is what happened

when Qarun was enriched by Allah: he led himself misguided by thinking that his wealth came from his own inherent abilities and greatness. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We caused the earth to swallow him and his home...' (*al-Qasas*: 81) as a warning to everyone else that wealth is not our inalienable property, but merely a trust placed in our charge. After all, if our wealth truly were our intrinsic property, we would be able to protect it from dilapidation and destruction. Allah afflicts us with catastrophes in order to snap us back to the reality that we are His successors on earth, and that we are wholly dependent on Him. It is this illusion of self-sufficiency that is the root of all corruption.

As we mentioned before, if we were to examine the world thoroughly and objectively, we would invariably come to the conclusion that whatever is left untrammelled by humans carries out its functions just fine and that all disruptions in the natural order come from our actions which contravene Allah's law. Conversely, when we intervene in nature in accordance with Allah's Law, everything continues to operate in a good working order.

Whenever you see something wrong with the world, it is because one of Allah's Rights has not been honoured. For instance, if you see a poor person writhing in pain from hunger or shivering from the cold because they cannot afford enough clothing to even properly bundle up, then it is because the wealthy have failed to duly fulfil Allah's Right of the prescribed almsgiving. Allah has precisely calculated the amount to be given in *zakat*, and if those who possess the means paid their necessary dues, there would not be any needy people in society.

Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* wants us to preserve the spirituality embedded in our inner nature, that primordial depository of faith in our soul which has not been adulterated by the lust of desire or the numbness of oblivion – that part of our soul which witnessed the pre-eternal pact of faith. He *Glorified is He* says regarding this: '[Prophet], when your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, 'Am I not your Lord?' and they replied, 'Yes, we bear witness.' So you cannot say on the Day of Resurrection, 'We were not aware of this' (*al-A'raf*: 172). This means that we made this covenant to Him *the Almighty* before our carnal desires and the torpor of this world overwhelmed

us and suborned us: and then say as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...We were not aware of this,’ or, ‘It was our forefathers who, before us, ascribed partners to Allah, and we are only the descendants who came after them: will you destroy us because of falsehoods they invented?’ (*al-A‘raf*: 172-173) Those who preserve this part of their soul and this divine sense which Allah Himself has put in our breast, and abide by the pact taken with Allah – it is they who keep the flame of their true inner nature burning brightly, otherwise it would be wiped out by sin

In this vein, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave the following parable: ‘Temptations will be presented to men’s hearts as reed mat is woven stick by stick and any heart which is impregnated by them will have a black mark put into it, but any heart which rejects them will have a white mark put in it. The result is that there will become two types of hearts: one white like a white stone which will not be harmed by any turmoil or temptation so long as the heavens and the earth endure; and the other black and dust-coloured like a vessel which is upset, not recognising what is good or rejecting what is abominable.’⁽¹⁾

The point is that our good deeds and our sins accumulate on our heart just as the threads of a mat are strewn together. The heart is made either white by righteousness or dark by sin. We are made up of both a soul and a body, the former endowing the latter with movement and thought. Before the two were conjoined, they were immersed in glorifying Allah, just like everything else in the cosmos; Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘each knows its [own way] of prayer and glorification.’ (*an-Nur*: 41)

We need to properly appreciate this truth and accordingly preserve the faith which animates in our hearts so that they can continue to be illumined. But if you neglect this part of your soul, ominous things may happen and you will become alienated from your own self. When your mind forces your body and your soul to commit sin, they hate you for it because, as we noted above, their natural state is to glorify their Creator *the Almighty*.

Sleeping is a mercy from Allah to the sinners because during that time, their limbs and their soul can take a break from their misdeeds, thus worship

(1) See Ahmad, *Musnad*, 5/386, 405; see also Muslim, *Sahih*, Hadith no. 144.

Allah for a while. This is why everyone feels recharged after sleeping: for that fleeting time, they were in tune with the rest of their being.

In this vein, it has been narrated that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* while his eye would sleep at night, his heart would stay awake.⁽¹⁾ His limbs were always in tune with each other, whether during his waking hours or when he was sleeping. That is why, if you see someone who is exhausted, it is because they have worn out their limbs, which want to take a break from them. The limbs are basically saying to their owner: Go to sleep! We cannot take you anymore!

The point is that Allah *the Almighty* tries to wake us up from our spiritual stupor by sending the Prophets. He further reinforces their message by referring to the previous scriptures, having us ponder the fate of those who dared defy the previous Prophets who came before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and how the end of the deniers was. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Is it not a lesson for them [to see] how many generations We destroyed before them...' (*as-Sajda*: 26)? He *the Almighty* also says in the chapter of *al-Fajr*: 'Have you [Prophet] considered how your Lord dealt with [the people] of 'Ad, of Iram, [the city] of lofty pillars, whose like has never been made in any land, and the Thamud, who hewed into the rocks in the valley, and the mighty and powerful Pharaoh?' (*al-Fajr*: 6-10)

These 'tent-poles' refer to the famous pyramids which people come far and wide to behold. This tourist attraction is a sign from Allah reminding us of the annihilation of these once-great rulers who had the temerity to call the Prophets liars. Allah *the Almighty* prevents us from having any excuse to not believe by revealing the cosmic signs which testify to His Oneness, the miracles which establish the veracity of the Prophets who convey His Message, and the scriptural laws which cannot be made any more perfect and which provide us with a panacea for our social diseases.

The ruins of those who dared deny Allah's messengers were still there for the Prophet's contemporaries to see for themselves. As Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'You [people] pass by their ruins morning and night: will you not take heed?' (*as-Saffat*: 137-138)

(1) See *Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3569; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 738.*

Here are the vestiges of the people of ‘Ad and Thamud attest their presence although they were buried under the earth, some were still visible above ground. Given that the average sandstorm in that region can engulf an entire caravan, you can well imagine how sandstorm after sandstorm from then until now would bury the tall buildings of Iram. The moral here is that these ruins should stand as a stark lesson on the fate of those who rebel against Allah. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Is it not a lesson for them [to see]...’ (*as-Sajda*: 26)?

This means that: ‘does this not point out to them and make clear to them the following...?’ ‘Guidance’ is comprised of three separate components: someone who provides guidance, someone who is guided, and the object of guidance. The root for ‘guidance’ is used in the Quran for three different purposes:

- When mentioning the Guide Allah *the Almighty*;
- When mentioning those who are guided, the human race;
- And when mentioning the object of guidance, that is, the end which Allah wants us all to arrive at.

The verb *hada* (to guide) often takes a direct object; as in *al-Fatiha* (the Opening) chapter. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Guide us to the straight way.’ (*as-Sajda*: 26) In this context, Allah is the guide, we humans are those who are to be guided, and the Straight Way is the goal to which we should be guided.

Elsewhere in the Quran, the verb ‘to guide’ also employs *al-lam* (the auxiliary preposition) to indicate its indirect object, as in the verse when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...Praise be to God, who guided us to this...’ (*al-A‘raf*: 43). Or *ila* (the auxiliary preposition) as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...God guides whoever He will to a straight path.’ (*al-Baqara*: 213)

Notice how only one Guide is ever mentioned, Allah *the Almighty* just as only one beneficiary the human race is ever referred to; however, the object of guidance differs from context to context. And while the prepositions ‘*lam*’ is usually used to refer to the object of guidance, in the verse at hand. As Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Is it not a lesson for them [to see]...’ (*as-Sajda*: 26)?

It refers to those receiving this guidance, otherwise, this verse could have been phrased as ‘Has not Allah guided these people (*to*) this (*li-hadha*)?’

Why is this the case? Some people feel that the religious obligations that come along with Allah's guidance are too high a price to pay, so we see some people deny of the religious obligations and considered them like a burden. Therefore worship things like stone idols, the sun, the moon, or so on because they do not impose any rules on their followers. Obviously, adoring these objects is much less taxing than submitting to the Lord.

Such religious obligations truly are a heavy burden for these sinners, being fundamentally at odds with their false desires. In any case, although indulging in our guilty pleasures may give us some degree of passing enjoyment, it is inevitably followed by undesirable consequences and the concomitant guilt.

A good example is that of a diligent student who perseveres through the toil of constant study, yearning to savour the sweetness of academic excellence. On the other hand is the indolent student who prefers to indulge in the quick fix of their fun and games at the expense of their studies, only to face the humiliation of failure at the end of the semester.

The point is that the toil of our work and the fruit it bears are really just two sides of the same proverbial coin. Knowing that the reward for our travail is far greater and more lasting than the temporary pain we have to endure helps put things in perspective.

Allah *the Almighty* wants us to fully apply ourselves to our religious commitments and to appreciate that, not only are they for our own benefit, but that we should consider ourselves honoured for being charged with this responsibility. Allah does not need anything from us, He does not in any way benefit from our actions; no, He provides us with this opportunity out of compassion for us, so that we might prove ourselves worthy of His grace.

Has Allah *Glorified is He* not promised that as He *the Almighty* say: '...If you are grateful, I will surely increase you [in favour]...' (*Ibrahim*: 7)? All of our deeds are both by us and for us; Allah is certainly not in need of our work, given how He already possessed the attribute of complete perfection before we even existed.

Thus, the preposition *lam* in the verse: 'Is it not a lesson for them [to see]...' (*as-Sajda*: 26) lends the meaning that 'Is it not a guidance (*for their*

own sake and their own benefit)...’? This guidance is in the interest of the guided, and not the Guide. If we truly appreciated this fact, we would bow down and kiss the hand of anyone who conveyed this truth to us.

If you are insightful, you will discern this meaning in verse the saying of Allah: ‘these are rightly guided by their Lord...’ (*Luqman*: 5). In other words, divine guidance is not a burden which they have to carry on their backs, but is a mount which carries them to the noble end willed for them by their Lord.

But what is it exactly that Allah is trying to ‘guide’ us to here? What truth is He trying to point out?

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...how many generations We destroyed before them, in whose homes they now walk?’ (*as-Sajda*: 26) Look and see how those who rejected the Prophets before you ended up: Allah did not let them lay a finger on His messengers but gave His messengers the upper hand.

The word ‘how many’ is meant rhetorically to indicate a great multitude, Just like when you say to someone who refuses to acknowledge all the favours you have done for them, ‘How many times have I done something for you?’ meaning, you have helped them out an innumerable number of times. Thus, the verse is not really asking a question, but is reaffirming that Allah has related to you the fate of many nations which were inimical to their prophets. And how did they end up? Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And We punished each one of them⁽¹⁾ 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 God who wronged them; they wronged themselves.’ (*al-’Ankabut*: 40)

It is for our own benefit that Allah tells us the fate of those who deny the truth, so that we can make sure to avoid meeting the same end. As we mentioned before in our discussion of the saying of Allah in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*: ‘A flash of fire and smoke will be released upon you and no one will come

(1) See *Ad-Durr al-Manthur fi at-Tafsir bi-l-Ma’tthur*, 6/463: Qatada said: ‘The saying of Allah ‘...some We struck with a violent storm...’ (*al-’Ankabut*: 40) refers to the people of Lut (Lot) Allah’s peace be upon him, whereas the saying of Allah ‘... some were overcome by a sudden blast...’ refers to the peoples of Saleh and Shuaib (Jethro) Allah’s Peace be upon them. As for His saying: ‘...some We made the earth swallow...’, it refers to Qarun; while ‘...and some We drowned...’ refers to the people of Nuh (Noah) Allah’s peace be upon him.

to your aid. Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?' (*ar-Rahman*: 35-36), we should consider this flash of fire a blessing, a blessing which we should not deny because Allah uses it to warn us of an evil end.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...how many generations...' (*as-Sajda*: 26). The word for *qarn* here is (generation) which also encompasses the meanings of 'century' and 'era.' When used in the sense of *qarn* (generation), it actually refers to three generations which stretch over approximately a century. Otherwise, if meant in the sense of 'era' – whether one associated with a particular religion or with a particular monarch, for instance, then *qarn* can stretch far longer in time, perhaps for a thousand years, as in the case of Nuh's (Noah's) *qarn*.

A *qarn* is thus defined by what it is associated with *ma qurina bihi*: hence, *Al-Asr al-Jahili* (Pre-Islamic Era), the Era of the Dawn of Islam, the Umayyad Era, the Abbasids Era, and the Mamelukes Era. And nowadays, of course, we live in the Modern Era.

As Allah *the Almighty* has explained to us, while human civilisation is constantly progressing materially, it is retrogressing spiritually. As each generation passes, people slip further and further away from the bond of religion. This is because material advancement produces luxuries which seduce us, and inevitably cause a decline in our morality. If our progress were absolute, as the modernists claim, our advance in the moral sphere would have been proportional to our advance in the technical sphere.

As Allah *Glorified is He* says in this regard: '...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 ...' (*Yunus*: 24).

If you carefully study the history of the major civilizations, even those from the Great Age of Progress, you will notice how they were unable to prevent their own decline. At first there was the Stone Age, then the Age of Steam, and now we are in the Space Age.

The point is that our evolution is limited to the material dimension of our civilization, and that we are de-evolving spiritually. A question arises: Can our material progress be attributed to our possessing Allah's Guidance here on earth? No, as Allah *Glorified is He* says elsewhere in the Quran: 'We have

sent down the Quran Ourselves, and We ourselves will guard it. Even before you [Prophet]' (*al-Hijr*: 9).

That is, it is Allah who has revealed this reminder; it is He who has preserved it. He has not left this task to us, as we are too feeble. Thus, the Book has been with us since the beginning as a witness against us.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...in whose homes they now walk...' (*as-Sajda*: 26)?

That is, Allah does not present us with an issue without providing evidence to back it up. In this case, the evidence of what happened to the sinners of old is standing right in front of the Prophet's contemporaries; indeed, they walk by them every day as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'You [people] pass by their ruins morning and night: will you not take heed?' (*as-Saffat*: 137-138) Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...There truly are signs in this- do they not hear?' (*as-Sajda*: 26) Here, Allah drives them to prick up their ears to the tale of how the obstinate deniers of truth were ultimately engulfed by Allah's wrath.

Even if you have not lived a very long life, you must at some point have seen a criminal get their just desserts. Or even if you yourself have not seen as much, you definitely have heard about it from someone else. Most people are kept in line simply by the knowledge that divine vengeance seeks out the sinners even before the Day of Resurrection. There is a profound wisdom in this: since the oppressor usually does not desist from their transgressions of their own accord, a taste of the punishment in store for them might snap them back to their senses; even if not, they can still serve as an example for others.

For their part, the Sufi Scholars say that no tyrannical oppressor shall pass away until Allah wreaks His vengeance on them. Those who persecute others may very well end up becoming weak and persecuted themselves. If you want to know how things turn out for the wicked, look no further than what happened to the disbelievers in the past.

Reflect on the saying of Allah: 'In this way, We make some evildoers have power over others...' (*al-An'am*: 129). You could almost say that the wicked are driven to visit vengeance upon their fellow transgressors. Thus does Allah have the evildoers destroy each other, instead of commissioning the righteous believers to do this, since they, by their very nature, possess a good heart which is more inclined to forbearance than violence?

After all, did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not say to the pagans of Mecca after his conquest of the city, 'You may go, for you are free.'⁽¹⁾ Allah is basically saying to the righteous, Just relax and leave the wicked to Me; I will send people even more wicked than them to shape them up.

Notice how the Truth emphasises the sense of hearing; Allah says: '...do they not hear?' (*as-Sajda*: 26) because it is through our sense of hearing that we can imbibe the stories of the ancient disbelievers and take to heart their moral; Allah also mixes it up, alternating between each of our senses to warn us of what is coming saying for instance in the following verse: '...Do they not see?' (*as-Sajda*: 27) and then, in another chapter Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...Do they not use their reason?' (*Ya Sin*: 68), thus alternating between each of our senses to warn us of what is coming.

Allah's saying: '...do they not hear?' (*as-Sajda*: 26) means; 'will not they listen to the story of the downfall of the wicked?' Even though Allah keeps reminding them of this, His warnings fall on deaf ears, with the disbelievers continuing to adore their false idols.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّا نَسُوقُ الْمَاءَ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ الْجُرُزِ فَنُخْرِجُ بِهِ زَرْعًا
تَأْكُلُ مِنْهُ أَنْعَامُهُمْ وَأَنْفُسُهُمْ أَفَلَا يُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

Do they not consider how We drive rain to the barren land, and with it produce vegetation from which their cattle and they themselves eat? Do they not see? [27] (The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 27)

Note how both here and in (*as-Sajda*: 26), the end of the verse complements the beginning. 'Is it not a lesson for them [to see]...' (*as-Sajda*: 26) meaning,

(1) See Ibn Hisham, *As-Sira An-Nabawiyya*, 4/412; it is reported that Ibn Ishaq said that certain scholars have related to me that when Messenger Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him delivered his speech at the portal of the Ka'ba, he proclaimed, 'There is no god but Allah, Who is Alone without a partner. Allah has been true to His Word: He has granted victory to His servant, and He has single-handedly defeated the confederates... How do you think I will treat you now [that I have full power over you]?' The people of Mecca responded, 'You will treat us well because you are a noble man from a noble family.' Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him turned to them and said, 'You may go, for you are free.'

‘Are these historical stories not a guide to them...?’ Such stories are of course conveyed through the auditory faculty. Allah says: ‘...do they not hear?’ (*as-Sajda*: 26) In contrast, since this verse refers to visible scenery, it follows with ‘...Do they not see?’ (*as-Sajda*: 27) One aspect is meant to be heard, whilst the other is to be seen.

A further contrast between the two verses: whereas the saying of Allah: ‘how many generations We destroyed before them...’ (*as-Sajda*: 26) focuses on how Allah destroyed [past tense] the disbelievers of the bygone eras. That draws our attention to one of Allah’s recurrent signs in creation: namely, how He drives [present tense] the rain. Then comes the saying of Allah: ‘...We drive rain to the barren land...’ (*as-Sajda*: 27). The use of the present tense indicates how Allah is continually carrying out this process. At every moment Allah propels the clouds onward and sends rain down unto the dry barren land to imbue it with the verdure of a myriad of plants. By perpetually being manifested before all of us, this sign beckons to us to witness and ponder it: ‘...Do they not see?’ (*as-Sajda*: 27)

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘We have adorned the earth with attractive things so that We may test people to find out which of them do best, but We shall reduce all this to barren dust.’ (*al-Kahf*: 7-8) The word *juruz* – which in (*as-Sajda*: 27) was translated as ‘dry barren land’ and here as ‘barren dust’ – has the basic meaning of soil without any plants on it, whether due to drought or simply because all its plants have been completely harvested.

In the saying of Allah: ‘...We drive rain to the barren land...’ (*as-Sajda*: 27) ‘To drive’ means ‘to prod along quickly,’ as when you say to someone who is pushing you to hurry up, ‘Why are you trying to drive me along so fast?’ To drive something of course indicates that you are pushing from behind, as opposed to dragging it from the front. When you drive someone along, you make sure they are in front of you; otherwise if they were in back, they would be able to slip away unnoticed.

The direct object referred to in Allah’s saying may be the clouds. He *Glorified is He* says: ‘It is Allah who sends forth the winds; they raise up the clouds; We drive them to a dead land and with them revive the earth after its death: such will be the Resurrection.’ (*Fatir*: 9)

It may also refer to the rain, as is the case in Allah's saying: 'Do they not consider how We drive rain to the barren land, and with it produce vegetation from which their cattle and they themselves eat? Do they not see?' (*as-Sajda*: 27) After driving the rainwater from the clouds, Allah then drives it from the soil either into the rivers or form aquifers beneath the earth's surface.

Our Lord *the Almighty* has given us these deposits of water beneath the earth, so that we can access them in times of need. Also, since the water lies in the subterranean layers of the soil, we are spared, having to deal with various other issues, such as having to build dykes to control water flow or to build other mechanisms to prevent evaporation.

In this vein, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* once said, 'The parable of the guidance and knowledge which Allah has sent me with is that of abundant rain cascading onto the ground: the fertile patches of the earth absorb some of it, producing pasturage; the arid patches of the earth store some of it, from which people quench their thirst and in turn give drink to their cattle and irrigate their crops; while the lowlands neither store the rainwater nor produce any herbage. Such is the parable of the guidance and knowledge which Allah has sent me with.'⁽¹⁾

These three types of earth represent the three types of knowledge from which people get benefit. The first type absorbs the water and produces herbage, while the second reserves the water for our direct benefit. But what is the benefit of the lowlands which neither retain any water nor produce any pasturage? Why did Allah bother creating them in the first place?

It is these lowlands which store the rainwater inside the earth. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...We bring down water from the sky for you to drink-you do not control its sources.' (*al-Hijr*: 22) He *the Almighty* also says: 'Say, 'Just think: if all your water were to sink deep into the earth who could give you flowing water in its place?' (*al-Mulk*: 30)

The point is that these lowlands do have a specific function, if you understand their role in this whole process; Allah *the Almighty* after all, would

(1) Narrated by Ahmad in his *Musnad* (399/4), 'Abdullah ibn Ahmad in his *Az-Zawa'id 'Ala al-Musnad* (399/4); Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, the 'chapter on Knowledge' (20); Muslim, *Sahih Muslim* (2282) on the authority of Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari.

never create anything in vain. Back to our parable: the fertile earth and the arid earth both refer to people from whom we derive the direct and immediate benefit of knowledge, while the lowlands represent those whose benefit may not become apparent until the next generations.

The freshwater which Allah forms into aquifers inside the earth does not simply dissipate into the ground, nor does it otherwise mix with the saltwater; rather, it courses along in quasi-tubes. Indeed, such springs can even be found beneath the bed of a salt lake.

This is one of the wonders which point to the Lord's Omnipotence. The barrier existing between the freshwater and the saltwater when they meet in the open sea is a case in point. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'He released the two bodies of [fresh and salt] water. They meet, yet there is a barrier between them they do not cross.' (*ar-Rahman*: 19-20) There is also a barrier between freshwater and saltwater under the surface of the earth.

The True Lord *the Almighty* wants to draw our attention to this visible sign. He *Glorified is He* says: 'Do they not consider how We drive rain to the barren land...' (*as-Sajda*: 27). It goes without saying that all of us have physically witnessed this phenomenon. What the Quran is really asking us here is whether we have truly contemplated this reality to come to a realisation of Allah's Omnipotent Power?

The phrase '...We drive...' (*as-Sajda*: 27) further alludes to Allah's constant maintenance of creation. Although it is the angels who directly carry out this task, nevertheless, they are ultimately acting under His Commandments.

The True Lord *the Almighty* has ordained that cattle be allowed to munch on our crops before us, even though they were created to serve man. This is because they mostly consume plants that are still green, not totally ripe. In letting these cattle fatten up off our plants, Allah is actually preparing food for us so that we can dig into these walking bourguignon.

Once again, the nuance of the Quran comes out in the ending of this verse wherein Allah *the Almighty* says: '...Do they not see?' (*as-Sajda*: 27) This is because this issue is related to the faculty of our vision. You may notice a similar use of such nuance in the following passage as Allah *Glorified is He*

says: ‘Say [Prophet], “Just think, if Allah were to cast perpetual night over you until the Day of Resurrection, what god other than He could bring you light? Do you not listen?” Say, “Just think, if Allah were to cast perpetual day over you until the Day of Resurrection, what god other than He could give you night in which to rest? Do you not see?”’ (al-Kahf: 71-72)

Notice how the first verse in this quote ends with His saying, ‘...Do you not listen?’ while the second ends with His saying, ‘Do you not see?’ This is because the darkness of night forces us to rely on our sense of ‘hearing’, whilst ‘seeing’ is the primary sense we utilise during the day. The point is that the Quran’s expressions are full of that most inimitable subtlety commiserates with the Speech of the Lord, Who arranges every word in its proper place.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَىٰ هَٰذَا الْفَتْحُ إِن كُنتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٢٨﴾

And they say, ‘When will this Decision be, if you are telling the truth?’ [28] (The Quran, as-Sajda: 28)

The word ‘when’ is usually an interrogative particle used to inquire about the timeframe of something; in this context, it indicates how the disbelievers perceived the Last Day as something far off and unlikely.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told his people that he had been sent with a Divine Message and Miracles from Allah to back him up. He furthermore described what the fate of those who chose to follow him would be, and what the fate of those who chose to defy him would be.

He *peace and blessings be upon him* also made clear that Allah *the Almighty* would not have sent him merely to abandon him, and that, on the contrary, it is Allah’s Law to grant victory to His Prophets. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Our Word has already been given to Our servants the Messengers: it is they who will be helped, and the ones who support Our Cause will be the winners.’ (as-Saffat: 171-173)

Every time the Muslims have failed to secure victory – including those episodes from the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* –

can be attributed to the warriors' failure to fulfil the true conditions of being Allah's Soldiers, since those who fight only for Allah's sake never taste defeat.

Thus, with regards to the (partial) defeat at the battle of Uhud, Allah taught the believers that the presence of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in their midst would in no manner exempt them from the spiritual and social laws of the universe. This is because Allah's Law is immutable.

What happened at Uhud is that some of the Muslim archers disobeyed Prophet Muhammad's orders to stay in their stations until the fighting had ceased. When it seemed as if the pagans were retreating, some of the archers ran out into the battlefield to grab the spoils, at which point the pagans turned around and wiped out the few archers that had remained in place. As a result of this lapse in discipline, the Muslims – while perhaps not being defeated per se – certainly did not win a clear victory, given that the tide of battle turned against them even though Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself was in their midst.⁽¹⁾

Some people take issue with the outcome of Uhud, wondering how it is conceivable that an army led by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* could possibly be defeated. But this setback definitely does not detract from him in the slightest. Since Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not going to live among his Companions forever, it was necessary for them to see with their own eyes the result of disobeying his orders, so that they could come to appreciate their sanctity.

If the disobedient Muslims had secured victory in this situation, they would have lost confidence in the efficacy of the Prophetic instructions, since such

(1) Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* appointed 'Abdullah ibn Jubayr, the brother of 'Amr ibn 'Awf, to lead the archers who numbered fifty. He then commanded him, saying: 'Keep the [The people of Mecca] cavalry at bay with your arrows so they can not attack us from behind. Regardless of whether the battle is turning in our favor or against us, stay in your positions; for our part, we will make sure they do not attack from the front.' Ibn Hisham's *As-Sirat An-Nabawiyya* (10/3). Al-Bayhaqi quoted in *Dala'il An-Nubuwwa* (229/3) that after the defeat of the pagans, the archers abandoned their positions to grab the war booty. Ibn Jubayr reproached them, 'Do not you remember what the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to you?' to which they responded, 'We are going to join the others and collect our war booty!' After this, the people of Mecca swung back and fought the Muslims until only twelve men were left with Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him*.

orders, under the case if they were granted victory, would obviously prove less than necessary for success in the balance of things.

Similarly, with regards to the battle of Hunayn, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...even on the day of the Battle of Hunayn. You were well pleased with your large numbers, but they were of no use to you: the earth seemed to close in on you despite its spaciousness, and you turned tail and fled...' (*at-Tawba*: 25).

The believers felt so assured of their vast numbers that even Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* exclaimed, 'Only a force more immense than ours could possibly stop us!' Allah let them dangle over the very precipice of defeat in order to teach them a lesson, but in the end, He pulled them back out of His Mercy, and turned the tide of battle in their favour.

The True Lord *the Almighty* teaches us to obey His Commandments, to sincerely fight for His cause Alone and to discipline ourselves so that we can achieve the goal at hand. If we disregard Allah's Commands, we will necessarily be deprived of this reward, since if Allah rewarded us regardless of whether we listened to Him or not, His commandments would lose their prerequisite gravitas.

Then He *Glorified is He* relates what the idolaters said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'And they say, when will this Decision be...' (*as-Sajda*: 28), which was promised to you by Allah. Such a victory seemed quite distant at the time, given how the believers amounted to no more than a rag-tag band.

This is why, when Allah *the Almighty* revealed His following saying: 'Their forces will be routed and they will turn tail and flee.' (*al-Qamar*: 45), 'Umar was utterly dumbfounded, exclaiming, 'What forces could this verse possibly be referring to, given we cannot even protect our own selves?!' But the True Lord *the Almighty* did not leave them in this situation for long; for soon after this passage was revealed, the battle of Badr took place, 'Umar saw with his own eyes the fulfilment of Allah's Promise as the army of the idolaters was actually routed. At the end of the battle, he, i.e. 'Umar muttered in awe, 'Lord, the forces indeed have been routed, and they truly have turned their backs in flight.'⁽¹⁾

(1) 'Ikrima *Allah be pleased with him* said that 'When the verse, "Their forces will be routed and they will turn tail and flee." (*al-Qamar*: 45) was revealed, 'Umar *Allah be pleased* =

‘It is most peculiar how Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* revealed to his Companions the outcome of the battle before it even had gotten underway. Before the onset of the fighting, he pointed with his cane to the exact plots of earth where Abu Jahl, ‘Utba and Al-Walid – among many others – would meet their fate.’⁽¹⁾

How could anyone have predicted the battle in such detail, given how battles are a jostle of blows, attacks, and retreats, with soldiers from both sides jumbling together in a confused melee? Furthermore, the Muslims had set forth only with the intention of raiding a caravan, not engaging a full-blown army. I mean, think how much more redoubtable the Muslim company would have been if they had been fully decked out for a serious military showdown. The idolaters were well aware of this, and took this into consideration when they sized up this nascent military force. Allah trumpeted the fact that a rag-tag band not even fully prepared for battle managed to vanquish a much larger and much more prepared company, in order to fill the hearts of the disbelievers with dread.

The question which the deniers of truth pose here as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...And they say, when will this Decision be, if you are telling the truth?’ (*as-Sajda*: 28) is not meant as a serious inquiry, but rather, it is posed in a sarcastic sense, as made clear in Allah’s Response. They thought that the possibility that Allah would actually deliver on His Victory which He promised His believing servants with, was somewhat farfetched – to say the least. But while the disbelievers perceived this event as being far off in an unlikely future (even though it did come to pass relatively quickly), they conversely prayed for Allah’s later Judgment to be hastened on them. Allah *Glorified is He* says about their attitude in this regard: ‘...If what you say is true, bring us the punishment you threaten.’ (*al-A‘raf*: 70)

= with him said, “What hosts could this be referring to?!” He continued, “On the day that the battle of Badr took place, I saw Messenger Allah’s *peace and blessings be upon him* don a coat of chain mail, reciting the verse ‘Their forces will be routed and they will turn tail and flee.’ (*al-Qamar*: 45), It was then that I understood its meaning.” This narration is quoted in the (*Tafsir*) of Ibn Kathir (226/4) and is attributed to Ibn Abu Hatim.

(1) Narrated by Muslim in his *Sahih* (1779) and Ahmad in his *Musnad* (219/3, 258) on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him.

Because the word *al-fath* (victory) is used here with the definitive article, we know for sure that it is meant in a positive way, and that its benefit will definitely be realised. Otherwise, if it were used in the indefinite, it would need some sort of qualifier to make clear whether this 'victory' were for or against us. For instance, Allah *the Almighty* says to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the chapter of *al-Fath*: 'Truly We have opened up a path to clear triumph for you [Prophet].' (*al-Fath*: 1) The adjective *mubin* (manifest) indicates that this *fath* is one in the Prophet's favour. For him, it is a profit, not a loss; or, as they say in banking, it accrues to your account and does not subtract from it.

Conversely, you have the verse, 'So, when they had forgotten the warning they had received, We opened the gates to everything for them...' (*al-An'am*: 44).

The point is that we should be very careful not to become deluded with the *fath* (victory, revelation, opening) Allah gives us. We need to consider whether it is meant to help us or to work against us. Do not let the toothy smile of this world cause you to become complacent and arrogant, because your *fath* might be nothing more than a temptation or a test. The word *fath* carries both these positive and negative connotations. Also, consider this passage in which Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'If the people of those towns had believed and been mindful of Allah, We would have showered them with blessings from the heavens and earth...' (*al-An'am*: 44). In other words, do not let these blessings make you arrogant and deluded.

Fath encompasses several meanings (each of which is clarified by context) as many words in Arabic, such as the multifaceted word '*ayn* (eye). Thus, we can say, 'I saw them with my '*ayn*, or 'I gave them lots of my '*ayn* (cash),' or 'I let them use the water from my '*ayn* (well) to irrigate their fields,' or 'They act as his '*uyun* (lit. 'eyes', metaphorically used for spies).' Words such as these, which are identical in spelling and pronunciation but different in meaning, are known as homonyms.

The root-word *fath* and its derivatives are primarily used in the physical sense of 'opening,' as in *fatahtu al-bab* (I opened the door). This is the primary epistemological meaning of the word. Thus, the chapter which relates

the story of Yusuf (Joseph) says: ‘Then, when they opened their packs, they discovered that their goods had been returned to them...’ (*Yusuf*: 65).

Conversely, it can also be used in the metaphorical sense of Allah granting us goodness and knowledge, as He *Glorified is He* says in the following verse: ‘...But when they are alone with each other they say, ‘How could you tell them about Allah’s Revelation [to us]? They will be able to use it to argue against you before your Lord! Have you no sense?’ (*al-Baqara*: 76)

The verb *fataha* can also mean ‘to adjudge the truth of a matter,’ which is why in Yemeni Arabic, the word ‘*al-ftih*’ refers to a judge.

In the verse under study, the word has the meaning of ‘victory’ or ‘domination’; Allah says, ‘And they say, ‘When will this Decision be, if you are telling the truth?’ (*as-Sajda*: 28) For their part, the believers respond that it is not theirs to tell the truth or not since it is completely out of their hands. The inevitable victory of the righteous is Allah’s Prerogative, and it is He Who has said that it will happen one day.

If we are going to make any claims to objectivity, we need to properly attribute actions to their true Maker. This is why, after his miraculous journey to Jerusalem, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says, ‘Last night, I was transported from Mecca to Jerusalem’,⁽¹⁾ indicating that it was a Higher Power which enabled his little sojourn. Nevertheless, despite the fact that he did not claim to have travelled with his own intrinsic ability, the disbelievers still complained, ‘Are you trying to say that you travelled in one night what takes us a month to cross with our camels at top speed?!’ But given their mastery of the intricacies of Arabic expression, it is rather difficult to conclude that they were not deliberately misconstruing his words.

The point is that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not complete this journey with his own abilities; it was His Lord *Glorified is He* Who transported him. Those who are not completely convinced that this incident took place need to look at it within the context of Allah’s Omnipotence, and within the context of how the passage of time relates to Allah. As we

(1) Narrated by *Al-Bukhari* in his *Sahih* (4710); *Muslim, Sahih, the ‘Chapter on Faith’* (170) on the authority of *Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah* Allah be pleased with him.

discussed before, an action which unfolds within a certain amount of time is known as a verb of engagement *al-fi'l al-'ilaji*. The Lord *the Almighty* for His Part, does not engage in actions, merely issuing His Order of 'Be' and it is! There is a conversely proportional relationship between an action and the time needed to undertake it whereby the greater the power of the agent, the less time is needed. Since Allah was the Main Doer of Prophet Muhammad's miraculous night journey to Jerusalem, no time actually elapsed, given how Allah's Infinite Power made it happen instantaneously.

The True Lord's subsequent answer to the disbelievers' question, '...When will this Decision be...' (*as-Sajda*: 28) shows us how the question was really meant in a dismissive and derogatory sense, and not out of actual curiosity.

Allah says:

قُلْ يَوْمَ الْفَتْحِ لَا يَنْفَعُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِيمَانُهُمْ وَلَا هُمْ يُنْظَرُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾

Say, 'On the Day of Decision it will be no use for the disbelievers to believe; they will be granted no respite' [29]
(The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 29)

In other words, why are you, o disbelievers, asking about the Day of the Final Victory? What point is there to you knowing its date? All you need to know is that, when it does eventually come to pass, the curtain will be lifted on your heinous crimes. A sudden 'conversion' or bout of penance on your part will not do you any good, nor will Allah *the Almighty* grant you any more time to mend your ways.

As is well known, you can only enter faith when there is still some life left in you; yet to believe in Allah only at the throes of death when your soul is rising up to your throat on its way to make its final exit, is no better than what Pharaoh did when he was drowning; Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...he cried, 'I believe there is no God except the one the Children of Israel believe in. I submit to Him.' (*Yunus*: 90) But Allah did not accept Pharaoh's last-minute conversion. He *Glorified is He* says: 'Now, When you had always been a rebel and a troublemaker!' (*Yunus*: 91)

At this juncture, there was no point in Pharaoh believing because he was already on his way to his Creator. The time to perform righteous deeds for

him had passed, and the time for judgment had arrived. To truly believe means to practice faith, while you are still in good health and still yearn for life. True faith cannot be born out of distress. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...they will be granted no respite...’ (*as-Sajda*: 29).

Your grace period has ended. Allah created you and knows your innermost secrets; He knows that if He gave you more time to mend your ways, you would go right back to the false you were doing; a fact which is realized in His saying, ‘...And even if they were returned, they would return to that which they were forbidden; and indeed, they are liars.’ (*al-An‘am*: 28)

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

فَاعْرِضْ عَنْهُمْ وَانْتَظِرْ إِنَّهُمْ مُنْتَظَرُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

**So [Prophet], turn away from them and wait: they
too are waiting [30] (The Quran, *as-Sajda*: 30)**

Like what we say in the following Egyptian proverb, ‘Show me your backside’ – meaning, ‘Get out of my face!’ The command here is to leave them alone because there is no common ground with them anymore, no point in trying to discuss things further. They have proven impervious to all means of persuasion; only the sword will restrain them now, as the poet once sang,

If perseverance should prove insufficient, follow up with a threat,

And if the threat does not do the trick, fall back on your resolve.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed his Message unto the Arabs, giving the glad tidings of paradise to those who believe, and the grim warning of the hellfire for those who do not. But they paid him no heed; thus,

Either revelation or a sharpened blade:

An intelligent person is convinced by revelation,

while an ignorant one is deterred only by the sword.

Allah’s saying: ‘...and wait...’ (*as-Sajda*: 30) is a direct command from Him *the Almighty* to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*

meaning, 'Wait for the coming of My Promise when you will be granted victory.' As we discussed earlier, Allah's Promise is always actualised without fail because no one and nothing can stop Allah from carrying out His Plans. We humans, by contrast, need to always be cognisant of our mortal limitations and of the fact that we do not really control the means to implement our designs. This is why the Lord taught us that, saying, '...do not say of anything, "I will do that tomorrow," without adding, "Allah willing", and whenever you forget, remember your Lord and say, "May my Lord guide me closer to what is right?"' (*al-Kahf*: 23-24)

This addendum referencing Allah's Will protects you from becoming a liar if you should end up being unable to fulfil your word because it is only Allah who controls the means by which we can do anything. In addition, when He *the Almighty* promises to do something, rest assured that His Word will inevitably be brought about.

If you say to your friend, 'I will meet you tomorrow, and we will do something together', you might be sincere, but you do not control any of the myriad variables that comprise the morrow. Something urgent might unexpectedly come up, or you might otherwise have a change of heart.

The difference between the 'waiting' of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the 'waiting' of the disbelievers is that the former is biding his time with perseverance for something that will definitely come about, whereas the latter are impetuously waiting at the behest of the devil's whisperings and their base egos.

Allah *Glorified is He* says '...they too are waiting...' (*as-Sajda*: 30); this means that the deniers of the truth are waiting for something to happen to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that will prevent him from conveying the Message. This was stupid of them, because they should have realised that he had Allah's backing. Allah *the Almighty* would never have abandoned him to the machinations of the disbelievers because it is His Law to make His Prophets victorious, regardless of how much power their foes may command.

The point is that these deniers of truth have no chance of bumping Allah's Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* off or even of

intimidating him to stop calling the people to Allah's Way. This idea also appears in the word *tarabbasa* (to lie in wait for, or to hopefully wait for), as Allah *Glorified is He* says in the verse, '...Wait, for indeed I am with you, among the waiters.' (*at-Tur*: 31)

He *Glorified is He* also says: 'Say, "Do you await for us except one of the two best things..."' (*at-Tawba*: 52) meaning that what do you possibly hope is going to happen to us, given that either we will vanquish you and humiliate you, or we will achieve martyrdom and thereby earn eternal bliss; Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...while we await for you that Allah will afflict you with punishment from Himself or at our hands? So wait...' (*at-Tawba*: 52). This means to wait to see what will happen to us because we are most definitely waiting to see what will happen to you. The difference, of course, between the two types of waiting could not be greater.

This chapter is entitled *as-Sajda* (The Prostration) because it contains a passage where we are supposed to pause for a moment and fall down in prostration to Allah *the Almighty* to express our appreciation. The act of prostrating represents the ultimate gesture of submission to the True Lord *the Almighty*. When we reach those parts in the Quran which convulse our very being, the Lord tells us not to ignore that feeling, but to immediately bow down instead of waiting for the next prayer to do so.

You could say that this verse holds within it a powerful command and an awesome secret calling on us to perform the prostration even though we are not in prayer – a bowing down ordered by the very One Who ordained the first act of prostration. All the passages in the Quran which enjoin our prostration radiate the beautiful energy of Allah's Grace.

The True Lord *the Almighty* wants us to feel that we are being showered with extraordinary blessings which we need to appropriately express thanks for, the regular prostrations of the ritual prayer not being enough.

The verse also contains certain symbolisms which the most righteous view as representing paradigms for how to preserve our soul and how to keep it connected with the wisdom of its Creator. For instance, while the eye can adjudge the outward beauty of something, we still need to contemplate the true meaning of beauty and ugliness. True ugliness is not necessarily what

looks ugly to your eye, but what distorts the Allah-ordained natural beauty of something, for Allah *the Almighty* has created everything beautiful; He *Glorified is He* says: '...Who gave everything its perfect form...' (*as-Sajda*: 7).

If something seems repulsive to you, keep in mind that you are looking only at the aesthetic dimension. Instead of dismissing something which might appear unseemly to you, you should rather say to yourself that you have not yet realised its inner beauty.

As we discussed earlier, Allah has spread out the various talents among all humanity, so that the aggregate talents of any one person are no less than the aggregate talents of any other. Thus, we should not praise some people for being rich or dismiss others for being poor, but rather, we should try to evaluate all their virtues.

There is a story⁽¹⁾ that Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* once spat on a mangy dog. Allah then empowered the canine to speak, saying, 'Is it me that you find fault with or the One Who created me?' The moral of the story is that Allah has created everything – even mangy ole dogs – for some deeper wisdom.

Most true do the words of the poet⁽²⁾ ring:

For ugliness, there is a time when its beauty does appear,

Even the slipshod architect is praised when his building must be demolished.

Similarly, the True Lord *the Almighty* has strewn out His Wisdom in various places, just as He has strewn out His Blessings in the Scripture of which no verse can do without the other, no word can suffice alone, and even no letter is enough without its companions. But it is only those endowed with Divine insight that can capture the Lord's secrets.

(1) *The story of Nuh (Noah) peace be upon him with the dog which suffered from a skin disease.*

(2) These lines are composed by Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi himself.

Index

Chapter of *ar-Rum*

Verse 1	7	Verse 31	111
Verse 2	8	Verse 32	115
Verse 3	8	Verse 33	117
Verse 4	10	Verse 34	121
Verse 5	10	Verse 35	127
Verse 6	17	Verse 36	129
Verse 7	19	Verse 37	134
Verse 8	22	Verse 38	137
Verse 9	28	Verse 39	145
Verse 10	33	Verse 40	153
Verse 11	35	Verse 41	157
Verse 12	36	Verse 42	165
Verse 13	37	Verse 43	169
Verse 14	38	Verse 44	171
Verse 15	38	Verse 45	179
Verse 16	39	Verse 46	184
Verse 17	39	Verse 47	187
Verse 18	43	Verse 48	189
Verse 19	45	Verse 49	193
Verse 20	51	Verse 50	194
Verse 21	58	Verse 51	200
Verse 22	64	Verse 52	202
Verse 23	70	Verse 53	207
Verse 24	75	Verse 54	209
Verse 25	78	Verse 55	213
Verse 26	81	Verse 56	221
Verse 27	84	Verse 57	223
Verse 28	92	Verse 58	226
Verse 29	101	Verse 59	233
Verse 30	106	Verse 60	235

Chapter of *Luqman*

Verse 1	243	Verse 18	364
Verse 2	246	Verse 19	369
Verse 3	249	Verse 20	373
Verse 4	252	Verse 21	397
Verse 5	259	Verse 22	400
Verse 6	262	Verse 23	403
Verse 7	274	Verse 24	406
Verse 8	277	Verse 25	410
Verse 9	279	Verse 26	412
Verse 10	282	Verse 27	415
Verse 11	291	Verse 28	427
Verse 12	294	Verse 29	436
Verse 13	323	Verse 30	446
Verse 14	326	Verse 31	452
Verse 15	334	Verse 32	456
Verse 16	340	Verse 33	460
Verse 17	344	Verse 34	470

Chapter of *as-Sajda*

Verse 1	485	Verse 16	533
Verse 2	487	Verse 17	535
Verse 3	490	Verse 18	540
Verse 4	497	Verse 19	542
Verse 5	503	Verse 20	545
Verse 6	505	Verse 21	546
Verse 7	506	Verse 22	548
Verse 8	511	Verse 23	549
Verse 9	512	Verse 24	552
Verse 10	517	Verse 25	552
Verse 11	518	Verse 26	554
Verse 12	520	Verse 27	564
Verse 13	525	Verse 28	568
Verse 14	529	Verse 29	574
Verse 15	531	Verse 30	575