

vol. { 2 }

REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY
الشعر اوان

فواطـر

المجلد { 2 }



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

vol. { 2 }

REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY
الشعراوى

فواطـر

المجلد { 2 }

REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY
الشعر اوان

فواطـر

Published by :



AL HOŞN RESEARCH & STUDIES CENTRE

Tel +97126265151

info@alhosnuae.ae

Printing & Binding:

Printing Group

info@printinggroup.com

ISBN: 978-9948-36-806-9

First edition 1441 H. - 2020

©All rights reserved to Al Hosn Research & Studies Centre
No part of this book maybe reproduced or transmitted
including printing, publishing, photocopying, or storing
by any electronic or mechanical means without written
permission from the publisher.

The Chapter of

al-Baqara

Continued

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَكْتُمُونَ مَا أَنزَلْنَا مِنَ الْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَهْدَىٰ مِنْهُ بَعْدَ مَا بَيَّنَّاهُ
لِلنَّاسِ فِي الْكِتَابِ ۖ أُولَٰئِكَ يَلْعَنُهُمُ اللَّهُ وَيَلْعَنُهُمُ اللَّاعِنُونَ ﴿١٥٩﴾

**As for those who hide the proofs and guidance We send
down, after We have made them clear to people in the
Scripture, God rejects them, and so do others [159]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 159)**

When the True Lord *the Most High* puts forth this matter, He tells us what the requital will be for those who conceal that which God has revealed. Some of the People of the Book suppressed the evidence of truth which God revealed in the scriptures they had in their possession, evidence of the truth of Muhammad's Prophethood; and this suppression would cause evil to thrive and spread, and every time the world suffered this evil, it would curse them; and to 'curse' here means to expel and exclude from God's mercy.

The True Lord *the Most High* is telling those who believe in our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that this requital of denunciation and curse is not for those people specifically, but rather, it includes all those who suppress the evidence of truth that God has sent down. So this is both a description of the action already done by some People of the Book and also a warning to those who believe in Islam not to suppress God's evidence of truth; otherwise, they will risk the same fate as the others, which is to be rejected.

The word 'curse' (*al Baqara*: 159). This clarifies for us that this rejection from God will be in both this world and the Hereafter, and that all the people will reject them. In the verse, we are currently examining, we find that the curse is even more comprehensive because '...those who curse' means both human beings and all other creatures, as though everything in existence will share in their curse. For example, if God withheld rain from a people because of their sins, the plants will curse them because they, too, will be deprived of water, and the animals will curse them because they will be deprived of water, and the whole place will curse them because they will have contravened the action of all places, which is to praise God. As for the curse in the Hereafter,

where plants and animals have no part to play, the rejection will be from God and the angels and all of humanity, meaning everyone from the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* until the end of time. But these will include both disbelievers and believers, and so how can it be that the curse comes from a disbeliever, who is himself cursed?

We say: In this world, there are those who deceive other people about religious matters, and there are those who allow themselves to be deceived. And so once everything comes into the open in the Hereafter, and the deceivers are revealed and fall into the hands of those whom they had deceived, at this point, the ones who were followed, will disown their followers, and the deceiver will disown those whom he had deceived, and those who were deceived will disown those who deceived them; and every time a group of those who allowed themselves to be misled are cast into the fire, they will curse the ones who deceived them; and every time a group of deceivers are cast into the fire, they will curse the ones who allowed themselves to be deceived, and so they will exchange curses. The True Lord *the Most High* says that those who were followed would come to disown their followers (*al-Baqara*: 166). And He says that every time a group of them enters the fire, it will curse its fellow group (*al-A'raf*: 38).

So, the disbelievers will reject one another, just as this is the case in this world. Those who disbelieve in God's teachings and act with corruption and injustice are cursed by those who follow God's teachings, and they are cursed by the ones they treat unjustly; and then again, they in turn curse the one who treats them with injustice, and he curses them back, and so all humanity curses the evildoers.

So, cursing by angry and violent banishment is different from the legal disciplinary banishment, to which the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* sentenced the deserters at the battle of Tabuk. They called the battle of Tabuk 'the battle of Hardship,' because it was fraught with all kinds of difficulties: Tabuk was very far from Medina; and there were not enough mounts to carry all the warriors so that ten men would take turns riding a single mount; and there were also meagre supplies so that they had to eat dates ridden with

maggots, and they ate⁽¹⁾ fat, and lard, and rotten food; and water, too, was scarce so that , they were forced to slaughter camels to drink the water stored in their humps and bellies; and the weather too, was harsh, and extremely hot. All of these conditions were very difficult to endure, and meant that only those who were sincere in their faith went out to the battle.

That battle was a test and a trial of faith for the people, and some of them gave in to their misgivings and remained in Medina. One of them then said, ‘Will I remain here in shade, while the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* is in the glare of the sun? By God, this will never be!’ Then, he stood and set off to catch up with the Muslim army. Another of them had an orchard which gave him shade and fruits, and he looked to his orchard and said, ‘Is it you that has prevented me from going out with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*? By God, you will no longer be in my possession after today, but I will offer you to God’s cause!’ A third was sitting in his house with his beautiful wife amidst his trees and crops, and he said: ‘Will I sit here with shade and palm dates, and a fine woman, while the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* is in the hot glare of the sun? By God, this shall never be!’ And he saddled his horse and set out to the desert to catch up with the Muslim army.

When the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* returned victorious, those who had not gone out with him sought his pardon on the grounds that they had not possessed the means to fight such as mounts, shields, swords, and arrows. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* accepted their excuses, but left their inner secret intentions to God, except for the three who told the truth, saying: ‘O Messenger of God, we were never richer than at the moment we failed to go out with you: we possessed the means to fight, and the mounts.’

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* decreed that no one should speak to them or have any dealings with them. Two of them remained in their houses, namely Hilal ibn ‘Umayya and Marara ibn Ar-Rabi‘, while

(1) We find that this is still the case now with the training of elite troops in armies. They are trained to get used to eating anything they find of food or drink to stay alive in case they should find themselves without supplies of food and drink in order to preserve their lives and defend their nations.

Ka'b ibn Malik would go out to see the people, but no one would speak to him, and he would go to pray with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and try to catch the Prophet's eye and greet him, but the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* would not reply, and would lower his eyes and avoid him, and Ka'b said later that he would look to the Messenger of God's lips to see if he returned the greeting silently or not.

Why was this? The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to show the people the correct way to discipline, banish, and chastise someone. Life became miserable for the three of them, and Ka'b went to his cousin Abu Qatada and climbed his wall because he knew he would not be admitted if he knocked on the door. But even after he climbed over the wall, his cousin would not look at him, and so he pleaded with him: 'I ask in the Name of God, I ask in the Name of God, I ask in the Name of God!' But his cousin would not answer him, and so he said to him, 'You know that I love the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*!' But his cousin would not answer him, and so he kept on pleading with him to tell him when he would be pardoned, and Abu Qatada said: 'God and His Messenger know best.'

After forty nights of this banishment had passed, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* intensified the punishment and told the three men – by means of an envoy he sent to them – to stay away even from their wives. The banishment entered a new sphere of society, that between a man and his wife. Ka'b asked the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* if he should divorce his wife, and the Messenger answered, 'No, just do not go near her.' Some people suggested to Ka'b that he or his wife should go to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and ask permission for her to remain with him to serve him, as Hilal ibn 'Umayya's wife had done so, and had obtained permission from the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to stay and serve her old enfeebled husband. But Ka'b said, 'By God, I will not; for when Hilal's wife went to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and He said, 'He should not go near you,' she replied, 'By God, O Messenger of God, Hilal cannot do anything by himself!' And so he allowed her to remain to serve her husband; but I am a young man, and I fear that if I ask the Messenger of God, he will not give me this right.'

So, this is the nature of the punishment of disciplinary banishment, and it is not the same as an outright expulsion from the faith which is proved by the fact that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* made those he banished subject to commands which he issued to them; and then, ten days later the glad tidings of pardon came when the True Lord *the Most High* revealed His word that He has turned in His mercy towards the three who had been left behind, 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 God other than by returning to Him; and thereupon, He turned again to them in His mercy so that they might repent: for, indeed, God alone is the Acceptor of repentance and the Dispenser of Grace (*at-Tawba*: 118).

And so the True Lord *the Most High* does not close the door, but rather He leaves it open for people, even for those who disbelieve, and even for those who conceal the truth, so they should not think that their past disbelief, or concealment, or failure to support the truth, have closed the door on them, or have come between them and their Lord; and so the True Lord *the Most High* says:

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ تَابُوا وَأَصْلَحُوا وَبَيَّنُّوا فَأُولَٰئِكَ أَتُوبُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَأَنَا التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿١٦٠﴾

unless they repent, make amends, and declare the truth.

I will certainly accept their repentance:

I am the Ever Relenting, the Most Merciful [160]

(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 160)

That is, they announce their repentance which is originally an inner matter, and then they put right what they had made wrong, and then they make known to the people the truth which they had suppressed. The condition of repentance is to give back to people what is rightfully theirs; and so those who have concealed the truth, must reveal it. Concealment of truth is not only a matter between a person and their Lord, but it also harms other people. Concerning the opening of the door of repentance to His servants, God *the Most High* says that He turns to them in His mercy so that they might repent (*at-Tawba*: 118).

The word ‘repent’ (*taba*) means to go back to God; when a servant repents, he returns to his Lord seeking forgiveness for his sins and errors; and when

God turns to a servant, this means that He accepts their repentance. And so after it appeared that they would be punished, God pardons them and does not punish them. So repentance is to turn back to God, and when God's turning was placed before the repentance of the servants in His words 'He turns to them in His mercy so that they might repent' (*at-Tawba*: 118); this meant that the True Lord *the Most High* established repentance and made it possible in order to open the door of return to Him. So repentance has three stages:

The first stage is that God made repentance possible.

The second stage is that the servant repents.

The third stage is that God accepts this repentance.

And all of this means to turn away from disobedience and sin.

So if a person commits a sin, he must rectify this sin in the same way he committed it: if he sins in secret, it is sufficient that he repents in secret; but if he violates one of God's laws publicly, we say to him: It is not right for you to disobey God publicly in front of the people, thereby giving people a bad example which incites them too, to sin, and then, for you to repent secretly between you and God; rather, your repentance, too, must be public. And so the popular expression says, 'You punched me in the street, but you make up with me in the alley!'

To him who violates one of God's laws in front of the people, we say: You must also announce your repentance in front of the people. And so we avoid applying penalties where there is any doubt, but if a person boasts about the sins he has committed, we cannot leave him alone. For example, if four witnesses see a person committing a major sin like adultery, and has been brazen enough to allow four people to witness his sin, does it make sense for us to say that we should not apply the penalty because there is doubt? No; he has violated the law in public, and so he should be punished with the proper legal penalty. But as for those who repent, and put right what they had wronged, and make known what they had concealed, their reward is that God will accept their repentance.

Out of His kindness to man, God made it possible that they could repent when they feel they have sinned, and made it a matter of one action from the one who repents and another from the One who accepts this repentance, namely

God *the Most High*; and so He said, ‘...those who repent...’ and ‘...those, I shall accept their repentance...’ This is so, that when a person sins and repents, he will not feel that this is an irredeemable matter. The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...those, I shall accept their repentance, and I am the Acceptor of repentance, the Merciful.’ He will accept the repentance of all who repent of their sins, and will accept the repentance of all sinners; for He is *At-Tawwab* (‘the Acceptor of Repentance’), which, in Arabic, is an intensive form of the adjective.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَمَاتُوا وَهُمْ كُفَّارٌ أُولَٰئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ لَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ
وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿١٦١﴾

**As for those who disbelieve and die as disbelievers,
God rejects them, as do the angels and all people [161]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 161)**

They are those who are firm in their refusal to repent; and so their reward is curse and rejection by God, and by the angels, and by all men. God *the Most High* then continues:

خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا لَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمْ الْعَذَابُ وَلَا هُمْ يُنْظَرُونَ ﴿١٦٢﴾

**They will remain in this state of rejection: their punishment
will not be lightened, nor will they be reprieved [162]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 162)**

When the True Lord *the Most High* speaks about the suffering of the disbelievers in hell, and the duration of this suffering, and then indicates that this duration will be eternal, this tells us that there will be severe eternal suffering in Hell. Because God’s Mercy outstrips His wrath in the matter of suffering, He never mentions the eternalness of hell except in the chapter of *al-Jinn*, where He says that for him who rebels against God and His Messenger – indeed, the fire of hell awaits him, therein to abide for all eternity (*al-Jinn*: 23). Since there is a specification here, this means that every general statement about his matter is governed by this. The fact that the True Lord *the Most High* does not

generally use the phrase 'for all eternity' (*al-Jinn*: 23) when referring to the suffering of hell indicates that His mercy outstrips His wrath even in the matter of the decree of suffering. A problem has arisen because of a superficial understanding of the words of the True Lord *the Most High* when He describes events on the Day of Judgement when not a soul will speak unless by His permission; and of the hosts that are gathered for Judgement, some will be wretched and some, happy. As for those who will have brought wretchedness upon themselves, they will be in the fire where they will have nothing but moans and sobs; to abide therein as long as the heavens and the earth endure – unless your Lord wills otherwise; for, indeed, your Lord is a Doer of whatever He wills. As for those who will have been blessed with happiness, they will be in paradise, to abide therein as long as the heavens and the earth endure – unless your Lord wills otherwise – as an unceasing gift (*az-Zumar*: 105-108).

The True Lord *the Most High* speaks here about the Day of Resurrection and of the wretched and happy amongst mankind, and of how the wretched amongst them will be in hell where they will moan and sob; and we can imagine how they will breathe in the midst of the fire in its choking flames. A person breathes so he can take in air, but how can he take it from fire? This is indeed grievous suffering. And the denizens of hell will remain therein as long as the heavens and the earth endure.

Some superficial people may say, 'God places the wretched in Hell for as long as the heavens and earth endure, and then says the same thing about those who find happiness in paradise.' We say to them: The heavens and earth which exist now are different from the heavens and earth which will exist in the Hereafter. The heavens and earth of this world are the means by which we live, while in the Hereafter we will not eat by any means, but rather directly by the Creator of all means, and we will live in the Hereafter by the word 'Be!', not by means of farming, planting, and rain. The True Lord *the Most High* will replace the heavens and the earth on the Last Day; and this is what we gather from the words of the True Lord *the Most High* about the Day when the earth shall be changed into another earth, as shall be the heavens (*Ibrahim*: 48).

In light of this statement, we understand that what is meant here is the new heavens and earth which replace the old ones. Notice that the True Lord

the Most High qualifies His statement about the eternal suffering of the wretched by saying, ‘unless your Lord wills otherwise’ (*az-Zumar*: 107). It is as though the eternal suffering of the wretched in hell will be ended by the Will of God; for the wretched are not only the disbelievers, but also some of them will be the sinful believers, and these wretched sinful believers will suffer in hell commensurate with the severity of their sins; when the Hour rises and the requital comes, they will enter hell and receive their requital, but once they have paid their due they will be taken out. And so this duration spent in Hell will come to an end, and so the meaning of the words ‘unless your Lord wills otherwise’ (*az-Zumar*: 107) means that they will remain in Hell until a specified time.

With respect to paradise, the exception refers to the beginning. Why is this? It is as such because the believer who disobeys God will not enter paradise from the beginning, but will rather have to spend time in Hell before entering paradise, and so eternity in paradise for him will have something missing from the beginning. As for the wretched, eternity in hell for them will have something missing from the end. So the words ‘unless your Lord wills otherwise’ (*az-Zumar*: 107) mean that the disobedient believer will not enter paradise from the moment the Afterlife begins. The word ‘unless’ here is an exception of time from its beginning with respect to the happy ones, or an exception from the end of the time with respect to the disobedient wretched ones. So there is no contradiction although a superficial understanding makes it appear as though there is.

Coming back to the verse, we are currently discussing, and as for God’s words: ‘...the punishment will not be lightened for them...’, this means that when a person is punished for something, the repetition of his punishment might make him grow accustomed to it; but in reality, the punishment remains severe for him, and the passage of time will not make it lighter. God *the Most High* then says, ‘...nor will they be reprieved.’ We know that to grant reprieve means to leave alone, and so here it means that they will not be given a respite from their torment. Or, it may mean that they will not be looked at (the Arabic word used in the verse *yunzharun* supports both meanings); and there is another verse which suggests this meaning, when God *the Most High* says that He will neither speak to them nor look upon them on the Day of Resurrection,

and nor will He purify them (*al-Imran: 77*). This is because to look at someone suggests a kind of care. Why does God *the Most High* say, ‘...nor will they be reprieved’ (looked upon)? It is because you might look at something automatically without meaning to, but this look does not mean that you care about the thing. Yet He *the Exalted* will not look at them at all because to look at them, might indicate some kind of pity. And so they will not be looked at, meaning they will never be looked at, as though they will be completely ignored. The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَالْهَكَمُ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿١٦٣﴾

**Your God is the one God: there is no god except
Him, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy [163]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara: 163*)**

‘...Your God is one God;’ This is the foundational principle of all truth. The words ‘your God’ mean that the Deity is One God, and the fact is that the True God existed before disbelief did.

‘...There is no God but He...’ is the second truth because due to certain people’s heedlessness some others tended to turn to other ‘gods. ‘God’s saying *ilah wahid* (‘One God’) means that there is no second god. It is worth our while here to discuss the difference between the Arabic words *wahid* and *ahad* (both usually translated as ‘one’). The difference is that *wahid* means that He has no second, there is none like Him, while *ahad* means that He is not made up of parts. And so we cannot say that God is a ‘whole’ or that He is ‘holistic’ because the word ‘whole’ is the opposite of the word ‘part,’ and the word ‘holistic’ is the opposite of the word ‘partial,’ and ‘whole’ means something which is made up of parts or systems. God is Unique in His Oneness, and He *the Exalted* is Transcendent above everything, and beyond all compare, but I will give this example to illustrate, not to compare: A chair is a ‘whole’ because it is made of wood, nails, glue, and paint; can we say that the wood is a ‘chair,’ or the nails, or the glue, or the paint? No. So each part is not considered the total, but rather, the total is the sum of all the parts.

The word ‘holistic’ can be used of many things, but every individual part of each one can also represent the total. The word ‘man’ is a total word, whose

parts are the individuals like Muhammad, Zaid, Bakr, ‘Umar and Khalid; and we can also say that Zaid is a man, and this is correct, and we can say that ‘Umar is a man, and this is also correct. So, God *the Most High* is not ‘holistic’ because He is Unique (*Wahid*); and He is not ‘whole’ because He is One (*Ahad*).

The foundational principle of religion is: ‘And your God is one God; there is no God but He....’ The Quran does not use negation by saying ‘there is no god but God’ unless human heedlessness has ascribed godhood to any but God, or has ascribed it to God but to others as well as Him. The Quran negates this, and says, ‘...there is no God but He, the Compassionate, the Merciful.’ Besides God, there exists nothing except in His blessings and those whom He blesses.

Apart from God, there is nothing but a blessing, or one to whom blessings are given, and these are all gifts from the Most Merciful, and gifts from the Dispenser of Mercy. As long as everything except God is either a blessing or a blessed one, no blessing can be described as a god, nor can any recipient of blessings be called a god; for to receive blessings means that another has given these blessings to one as blessings are gifts and the one who receives them has been gifted them; and something which is a gift or is gifted cannot be a god, but rather, those who are infatuated with such things are only infatuated with means and causes, while the True Lord *the Most High* is the Originator of all causes.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* draws our attention to the things which serve this essential principle, and so He invites us to look at the universe and reflect on all the blessings we find therein. After this, o you whom God has blessed with these blessings, if you find anyone who can claim all this for himself, then give it to him and leave it to him, so ascribe blessings to their true Maker, God. Be careful not to ascribe God’s blessings to anyone but Him because God *the Most High* says in a Qudsi Hadith: ‘I am the most self-sufficient above any need for partnership, and so if anyone offers a work to others alongside Me, I will leave it for those partners of his.’⁽¹⁾

So the True Lord draws our attention to the universe, saying:

(1) Narrated by Muslim and Ibn Maja.

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَالْفُلِّ الَّتِي
تَجْرِي فِي الْبَحْرِ بِمَا يَنْفَعُ النَّاسَ وَمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مِنْ مَّاءٍ فَأَحْيَا بِهِ
الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا وَبَثَّ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ دَابَّةٍ وَتَصْرِيفِ الرِّيْحِ
وَالسَّحَابِ الْمُسَخَّرِ بَيْنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٦٤﴾

In the creation of the heavens and earth; in the alternation of night and day; in the ships that sail the seas with goods for people; in the water which God sends down from the sky to give life to the earth when it has been barren, scattering all kinds of creatures over it; in the changing of the winds and clouds that run their appointed courses between the sky and earth: there are signs in all these for those who use their minds [164] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 164)

Out of His mercy, God *the Most High* created man in a blessed state, and created everything in the universe as a blessing for him, and He draws our attention to this fact by using the universe itself as proof, and lists many phenomena of the universe which no one has claimed to be their doing and their creation. If those who do not believe in the One God were to come and ascribe divinity to anyone but Him, we say to them: This amazing universe which is represented by the earth and the heavens, the succession of night and day, the ships which pass through the sea, the waters which God sends down from the sky, and by the clouds which run their appointed courses between the sky and the earth: all of these signs, these amazing matters, show that their Maker must be more magnificent than all.

He *the Exalted* wants to alert the mind so that it will take the blessing of existence itself, and the universe which is subdued for it, and from these amazing signs realise the truth of God's words 'And your God is one God' (*al-Baqara*: 163), for it is nonsensical that anyone but God could have created all of this, and then failed to lay claim to it! In any case, no one has ever claimed to have created it; and as long as no one has claimed this, and you yourself, O mankind, have not created it, and whatever their disbelief and rebelliousness, no one has ever claimed such a thing, and until now no one has ever dared to make such a claim, this proves that God is One and Unique. The True Lord *the Most High*

says that greater indeed than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the earth; yet most people do not understand (*Ghafir*: 57).

Why? This is because man was created from the earth, and he subsists upon what the earth contains; and so based on this, it is clear that the creation of the heavens and the earth was greater than the creation of man. Men are the sons of the soil, and they derive all their sustenance from it and their lives depend on it for their continuation. It makes sense that the True Lord *the Most High* created mankind's constituent parts before creating mankind; and so that mankind could live, God then provided them with sustenance made of the same constituents from which they were made. Remember well what we said that when God presents the story of creation to mankind, He *the Exalted* presents it in a way that pre-emptively refutes any contrary explanation that could be offered for it. And so He is saying to us: The creation of the heavens and the earth, and your own creation, are all matters of the unseen, and as long as they are unseen, no one can have any opinion or point of view about them except the One Who created them, so take your knowledge of creation from Him. He *the Exalted* asserts that He did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor of the creation of their own selves; and neither does He take as helpers those that lead people astray (*al-Kahf*: 51).

This is why we must beware of those misleading people who try to lead us into error with ideas which have no basis in fact. The True Lord *the Most High* knew in pre-eternity that there would one day be people who would say that the heavens and the earth were created in such-and-such a way, and mankind was created in such-and-such a way. When we hear such things, we should say: These are the misleading people whom God warned us about from pre-eternity.

So, the presence of these misleading people is itself a proof of the truth of what God said about these people who say that the earth was a piece of the sun which broke away from it, and that mankind is descended from apes. If there were no misleading people like these, we would have said, 'Lord, where are those people who you said would lead others astray?'

When God *the Most High* tells us that He created us from the earth, and made all our sustenance come from it, science comes – even from those who disbelieve in God – and confirms this matter. When they analysed the human

being, they found that he is composed of sixteen constituents; and when they analysed arable soil, they found that it was also composed of the same sixteen constituents, the first of them being oxygen and the last being magnesium. And so the True Lord *the Most High* says, 'I created mankind from soil,' and we say, 'It is true, Lord, for you have made all of our sustenance come from the soil.'

So, the matter of the creation of the heavens and the earth must inspire awe; and you, o mankind, must look at what has been created for you so that it can point you towards your Creator, and so that you can believe, and testify that He is One God; and if any of the misleading people tries to lead you astray and tells you that there is another god, say, 'There is no god but He *the Exalted*!'

When the True Lord *the Most High* speaks about mankind, He *the Exalted* speaks about an object in the universe, and this object requires two things: time and space. The space for mankind is the earth upon which he walks, and the sky which covers him, and his time is the passage of day and night; and so the True Lord *the Most High* wants to give us a lesson from the alternation of day and night. The meaning of 'the alternation of day and night' is that each one of them follows the other: day follows night, and then night follows day. God *the Most High* makes it clear that He is the One Who causes the night and the day to succeed one another, thus creating a sign for anyone who has the will to take thought, or has the will to be grateful (*al-Furqan*: 62).

The succession of night and day means that day does not last forever without ever being interrupted, nor does night. There are other signs connected with this blessing of which the True Lord *the Most High* reminds us when He puts forth to us these questions to ponder: If God had willed that there should always be night about you, without break, until the Day of Resurrection – is there any deity other than God that could bring you light? Will you not, then, listen? And, if God had willed that there should always be daylight about you, without break, until the Day of Resurrection – is there any deity other than God that could bring you night, wherein you might rest? Will you not, then, see? (*al-Qasas*: 71-72).

And so as you, who move in the universe, everything applies to you which applies to the other things which move therein: you must rest commensurate with how much you work. And so time is divided into night in which you

rest, and day in which you toil, and so the True Lord *the Most High* tells us that He is the One Who made the night a garment for us, and made sleep a rest for us (*al-Furqan*: 47).

He *the Exalted* knows from pre-eternity that the night – the time of repose – cannot be a rest for everyone, but rather, there must be some people who do things which require them to stay awake at night, and to these people He *the Most High* says that among His signs is sleep, at night or in daytime (*ar-Rum*: 23). He gives those who must stay awake all night a chance to find rest during the day.

So, out of His greatness, the True Lord *the Most High* made time successively different; if it were night all the time, or day all the time, life would be ruined. And so we find that the True Lord *the Most High* made an oath, enjoining on us to consider the bright morning hours, and the night when it grows still and dark (*ad-Duha*: 1-2).

Midmorning is the time of work and toil, and night is the time of repose, and the two of them must exist. The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘Indeed in the creation of the Heavens and of the Earth; and in the alternation of night and day; and in the ships which pass through the sea....’ The Arabic word *fulk* (rendered here as ‘ships’) can be both singular and plural, as for instance when He *the Exalted* ordered Noah *peace be upon him* to build the *fulk* (ark) under His eyes (*Hud*: 37), He meant build a single ship; but as for the *fulk* (‘ships’) that pass through the sea, this means all ships. How can the passage of ships in the sea be a sign? You know that if water was not as yielding as it is, boats and ships would not be able to sail upon it, and water must flow in order that ships can sail upon it. Before the invention of engines, ships used to sail by the power of wind. Why? That is because water is divided into two kinds:

- The water of rivers,
- And the water of the seas.

The water of a river always flows from high to low towards its mouth, and so it makes sense for us to let the passage of ships upon it follow the direction of the current. But if we want to travel on the river against the current, we

need wind to help us do so. We usually think of wind (*'rih'* in Arabic) as being the same as air, but wind is power, and this is the meaning we have of the word, albeit in a different context, in God's instructing the believers not to allow themselves to be at variance with one another, lest they lose heart and their *rih* (moral strength) desert them (*al-Anfal*: 46). That is, being at variance only causes strength to wane. Wind is an obvious power, but when mankind developed the steam engine and used it to power ships, they no longer needed to seek to power ships with wind. And so we see that the word *rih* can mean 'wind,' but it can also mean simply 'power,' and a third meaning for it is 'scent.'

The Quran shows us this, for when the word *rih* is used to mean power, we find the Quran saying that if God so wills, He stills the wind, and then they lie motionless on the sea's surface (*ash-Shura*: 33).

That is, when God wills to remove the power of motion from anything, He *the Exalted* does so. As for the word *rih* meaning 'scent,' we find it when the True Lord *the Most High* says that as soon as the caravan with which Jacob's sons (carrying with them Joseph's shirt) were travelling was on its way, their father said to the people around him that he truly feels the scent of Joseph (*Yusuf*: 94).

Jacob, the father of Joseph *peace be upon them* had a powerful sense of smell, and when the caravan left Egypt, the father said, 'I can smell the scent of Joseph!' In the countryside, we hear people say, 'I will take revenge on So-and-so so that there will be no scent of him left on earth!' What he means is that there will be no trace of him left on earth; but why does he use the word 'scent' here? Just recently, it has been proven that scent is the longest-lasting trace left by living beings since those creatures with powerful senses of smell like police dogs are able to find fugitives by their scent alone. It is as though the criminal leaves a trace of his scent at the crime scene, and all that is needed is something with a powerful sense of smell to find him.

The True Lord *the Most High* gave us the power of reason, but he gave to those creatures which have no such power something which most of us cannot attain. The dog, a dumb animal, is able to find things which we could never find because he lives in the world of the sensory alone, while human beings have access to a part of the sensory world and also a part of the intellectual world.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...and in the rain which God sends down from Heaven, giving life by it to the earth after its death....’ Does this mean that there is water in the sky? No. the origin of water is on the earth; but the water of the earth is no good for us or for our crops, since it is salty and bitter. The water on the earth is only a store, and so God has placed within it chemicals which prevent it from becoming stagnant so that it does not change its state. Moreover, the surface area of this water is three times larger than that of the dry land: why? Because God wants the surface area of the water to be vast so that there is a large amount of water which can evaporate; for this evaporation is a kind of Divine distillation.

This sending down of water from the sky is what we know as rain; but before it falls, there are several stages, namely evaporation, and condensation, and seeding of clouds by wind, and so on. We have only just been guided to knowledge of these various stages quite recently since we have attempted to copy this cycle by evaporating salt water and condensing it to make water drops, but this costs a lot of money to fund; a single cup of distilled water takes a lot of time and effort, while the Divine process gives us so much pure water that we could not count it all. This process goes on, and we are unaware of it.

The water cycle begins with water vapour rising, and then it reaches a cold area and so it falls as pure fresh water. With amazing precision, the Wise Creator *the Exalted* made the level of sweet water always higher than the level of saline water. If the level of salt water was higher than sweet water, the saline water would flow down into it and spoil it, and we would have no water to drink. But the Wise Creator placed sweet water in the rivers on a higher level than the waters of the seas and oceans so that the water from the rivers would flow into the seas, and this does not cause any harm.

So, the True Lord *the Most High* informs us that He sends down water from the sky. How does this water come down? This is what we have come to know recently. And with this sweet water, God brings the earth back to life after its death. What is death? Death is the absence of motion; and when the earth dries up, there is no motion left in it. We cannot detect the motions of the earth while the crops grow from it with our senses, but God *the Most High*

affirms this when He says that we see the earth dry and lifeless – and when He sends down water upon it, it stirs and swells (*al-Hajj*: 5).

When rain falls onto the earth, its crust swells up, and rises to the surface. Then what happens? It puts forth every kind of luxuriant plant (*al-Hajj*: 5). This is the meaning of God's words '...giving life by it to the earth after its death...'

Then the verse continues: '...and by scattering over it all kinds of moving creatures...' that is, He places throughout it all the creatures which live on the earth. And the verse proceeds to mention '...the change of the winds...' The meaning of change (*tasrif*) is variation, that is, the way the wind changes and blows in a different direction, whether north, south, east, or west. This change means that the air has not a regular pattern of movement; and if we reflect on the movement of the air we find that it gives the air a diverse balance: sometimes it comes from hot regions and blows on cold places, and sometimes it comes from cold regions and blows on hot places. This change is a blessing from God; for if the winds never changed, they would be a source of woe for mankind.

We hear different names for the winds such as the east wind, and the west wind, and the north wind, and the south wind, and gales, and hurricanes, and icy winds. Generally, when, in the Quran, you hear the word 'wind' in the plural form 'winds' (*riyah*), this means that it is a good and useful kind of wind; while if you hear the word in its singular form 'wind' (*rih*), this means that it is a harsh and destructive wind, such as when God *the Most High* speaks of the fierce roaring wind that destroyed ancient aberrant tribes (*al-Haqq*: 6). But this general rule is broken in a single verse when God *the Most High* speaks about a good favourable wind helping people in sailing in ships on the sea (*Yunus*: 22). Why? That is because if the wind changes for a ship, this is a disaster, and a ship needs all the wind to come from a single direction. And so God did not simply use the word 'wind' by itself, but rather, He added that it was a 'favourable wind'; and then the True Lord *the Most High* continues that they rejoice with it, until there comes upon them a tempest (*Yunus*: 22).

Thus He *the Exalted* reminds us of His power so that , no one will think that God created everything, and created laws for it all, and then left it to its own devices. No, He *the Exalted* still directly sustains and manages the heavens and the earth, and He has absolute power over them.

Coming back to the verse under discussion, God gives further signs of His Power in the universe: ‘...and in the change of the winds, and in the clouds that are made to do service between the Heaven and the Earth....’ To be made to do service means to perform a specific action forcibly. God *the Most High* appoints a course for the clouds because He wants them to send rain down onto us, and so winds come to the cloud and take it where God wills it to go. You might benefit from rain which falls from a cloud in a place other than where you are, and we here in Egypt benefit from the waters of the Nile even though the rain falls in southern Sudan, and in the mountains of Ethiopia. If we only had the water which falls as rain from the skies above Egypt itself, we would all die of thirst. This shows the meaning of God’s statement that when the winds carried heavy clouds, He would drive them towards dead land and cause thereby water to descend (*al-A’raf*: 57).

A cloud follows its appointed route to the destination required from it, and it has no choice in the matter. The True Lord *the Most High* then concludes the verse by saying that in those wonders of the universe ‘...are signs for people who use reason.’ When the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...for people who use reason,’ it is as though He is awakening the faculty of intelligence and reason in the human soul. When someone addresses you and appeals to your faculty of reason, know that whatever he tells you, your intellect will agree after only a little thought; if not, he would not have mentioned the word ‘reason’ to you.

The Noble Quran always speaks of those who think, and those who use their reason, and those who reflect, and those who ponder. All of this means that if they thought, and if they used their reason, and if they reflected, and if they pondered, they would arrive at the fact that God wants them to grasp. The True Lord *the Most High* always wants the Muslim to respond to all matters with his reason, and his intelligence, and his reflection because He *the Exalted* knows that if a person thinks, or uses his reason, or reflects, or ponders, he will arrive to the right conclusion.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَتَّخِذُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَنْدَادًا يُحِبُّونَهُمْ كَحُبِّ اللَّهِ
وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَشَدُّ حُبًّا لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ يَرَى الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا إِذْ يَرَوْنَ الْعَذَابَ
أَنَّ الْقُوَّةَ لِلَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعَذَابِ ﴿١٦٥﴾

Even so, there are some who choose to worship others besides God as rivals to Him, loving them with the love due to God, but the believers have greater love for God. If only the idolaters could see – as they will see when they face the torment – that all power belongs to God, and that God punishes severely [165] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 165)

A rival is an equivalent or a counterpart, and the disbeliever is the one who sets up equivalents or counterparts to God. The idolaters do not deny the Divinity of God, but they set up rivals alongside Him, and they love those rivals as much as they love God, or they love them as much as you love God; that is, as much as the believer loves God, the disbeliever loves the god which he chooses to worship. ‘...But those who believe are stronger in love for God....’ Why? Because this is the love about which no one differs. While the love of the idolaters for their false gods does differ; for when the idolater is beset by difficulties, he turns to God Alone and not to his false gods, as God *the Most High* says that when affliction befalls man, he cries out unto God, whether he be lying on his side or sitting or standing (*Yunus*: 12).

By his primordial nature, the idolater reveals how he lies to himself by choosing to set up rivals against God, and so when things become difficult for him and the means fail him, he does not deceive himself any longer by saying ‘Save me, O idol!’ Rather, he says: ‘Save me, Lord!’ As for the believer, he never changes in his love for God; the believer loves his Lord whether times are good or bad, and so those who believe are strong in their love of God because they never forget Him, whether times are easy or difficult. But the disbelievers only recognise the True God when the going gets tough, and once the affliction is over, they behave just as the Quran says that every disbeliever behaves; he goes on as though he had never invoked God to save him from the affliction that befell him (*Yunus*: 12).

The Quran describes the situation when some trouble touches a man, and he turns to his Lord and calls on him: yet no sooner than God has touched him with His favour he forgets God on whom he before had called, and sets up rivals with Him, that he may beguile others from His way. Such a person is told to enjoy himself a little in his ingratitude; but he will surely be one of the inmates of the Fire (*az-Zumar*: 8).

They forget God, and return to their worship of these false rivals to His Divinity, and in doing this, they only wrong themselves. ‘...And if only they who have wronged would consider [that] when they see the punishment, [they will be certain] that all power belongs to God and that God is severe in punishment.’ These idolaters will be surprised by something which they had not been expecting. They believed in these rivals, and they will come forth on the Day of Resurrection to see that these idols are the fuel of the fire which torments them. If the idols made of stone which they used to worship did not come with them, they would say, ‘These stones will save us from this suffering!’, but the True Lord *the Most High* will say to them: These stones are not only sharing in your suffering, but they themselves are the fuel for the fire which torments you, as He says to them that indeed they, and all that they used to worship, instead of God, are but the fuel of hell (*al-Anbiya*: 98).

And the True Lord *the Most High* also says that the fuel of the fire of Hell would be human beings and stones (*al-Baqara*: 24).

And so the idolatrous disbelievers will lose all hope that their false gods might rescue them. The meaning of ‘...when they see the punishment...’ is, when they see their suffering with true certainty; they had already been told of it, but they did not believe in the Last Day. Had they but believed in the Day of Resurrection, it would have been enough for them to witness the suffering of hell with true vision and insight. The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the noble verse by saying ‘...that all power belongs to God and that God is severe in punishment.’ That is, when they see their suffering with true certainty, they will finally realise that all might belongs to God, and that He is severe in meeting out punishment.

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* tells us what their state will be when they witness this suffering, saying:

إِذْ تَبَرَّأَ الَّذِينَ أُتْبِعُوا مِنَ الذِّبِّ اتَّبَعُوا وَرَأَوُا الْعَذَابَ وَتَقَطَّعَتْ بِهِمُ الْأَسْبَابُ ﴿١٦٦﴾

**When those who have been followed disown their followers,
when they all see the suffering, when all bonds between them
are severed [166] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 166)**

Everyone who enticed others to disbelief and disobedience will disown all those whom they had tempted to disobey God, and associate partners with Him. Even Satan, the arch-deceiver, will disown them, and will tell them at that time that God promised them something that was bound to come true; and that he, too, held out promises to them, but that he had deceived them. Yet, He had no power at all over them, except that he but called them and they responded to him. So they should not blame him, but blame themselves. It is not for him to respond to their cries for help, nor for them to respond to his (*Ibrahim*: 22).

Satan will not be able to save any of the idolaters, and he will not call the idolaters to come and save him, and if the idolaters call for Satan, he will not come to save them. They will all disown one another, and the disbelievers will disown all those who made idolatry seem alluring to them; or the disbelievers will say to all those who made idolatry seem alluring to them; 'We renounce you, there is no connection between us and you!' The verse mentions those who were followed first, since they were the ones who tempted the others, and then it mentions the followers after that. They will see the suffering that waits them, and their hopes will be shattered, and every soul will be requited for what it had earned. Satan himself will confess that he never had any power except simply to invite them, and those who answered his invitation wound up in this final ending place. Having power over someone is based either on arguments or force; and Satan was never able to force the disbelievers to do anything, and only one action was possible for him without any power which was to invite them to associate partners with God, and they answered his invitation. So what will happen when their hopes are shattered? The True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوا لَوْ أَنَّا كُنَّا نَدْرِكُهُمْ لَسَخَّطْنَا عَلَيْهِمُ الْغَمَّ كَمَا تَبَرَّءُوا مِنَّا كَذَلِكَ يُرِيهِمُ اللَّهُ أَعْمَلَهُمْ حَسْرَتٍ عَلَيْهِمْ وَمَا هُمْ بِخَارِجِينَ مِنَ النَّارِ ﴿١٦٧﴾

the followers will say, ‘If only we had one last chance, we would disown them as they now disown us.’ In this way, God will make them see their deeds as a source of bitter regret: they shall not leave the Fire [167] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 167)

For those who followed to disown the ones they adored, will not do them any good, and their hope for a second chance – that is, a return to life – in order to disown them, will not be granted, and God will show them their previous actions so that they will regret them desperately. Despair is only felt when a person is afflicted with a calamity from which there is no possibility of escape. The meaning of ‘...and they are never to emerge from the Fire’ is that their regret for their evil deeds will not help them, and this regret will not affect their release from the fire. The True Lord *the Most High* says after that:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ كُلُوا مِمَّا فِي الْأَرْضِ حَلَالًا طَيِّبًا وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ ﴿١٦٨﴾

People, eat what is good and lawful from the earth, and do not follow Satan’s footsteps, for he is your sworn enemy [168] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 168)

Out of mercy for His servants, God *the Most High* did not address this statement to the believer alone, but rather, He widened the address to include both believers and non-believers, saying, ‘O mankind.’ It is as though He created everything on earth for all mankind, and this is what we referred to before as God’s Lordly bestowal of sustenance to all humanity, believer and non-believer alike. He *the Exalted* created all mankind, believers and non-believers, and since He created them and called them into existence He addresses them all together, believers and non-believers. It is as though this address were saying to the disbelievers: Even though you do not believe in God, take lawful things from the believers and utilise them because they will benefit you in your worldly lives even if you do not believe in God; for it is in your

best interest to eat what is lawful and good, as God only makes harmful things unlawful, and He only makes good things lawful.

Here there is an argument made by many of those who have wronged themselves, and who would love it if the matters of religion and the lawful and unlawful were false, because the only way they can feel good about themselves is to find things by which they can deny the religion because they cannot bring themselves to live up to God's requirements from them; and since they cannot do so, they cannot find any way out of this except to say that the religious standards of the lawful and unlawful are all false. Such people say, 'Since God has made something unlawful, why did He create it to begin with?'

It is as though they believe that every object in creation was created to be eaten, and as though they are unaware that every creature on earth has a purpose. In our times they extract the poison from serpents and snakes to use it to fight microbes which can kill people, while before they discovered the use of their poison they would say, 'For what purpose were these snakes created?' But once God put them in such a position that they needed to use the poison of these snakes in order to produce medicine, they realised God's wisdom in creating these species: He did not create them for us to eat, but rather, for our medicinal use.

So, if you see something unlawful to eat, do not ask why God created it because you do not know its true purpose for existence. It is not the purpose of every creature to be eaten by mankind, but rather, every creature serves a purpose in existence which might be unknown to you.

We use this same reasoning when considering our own lives. For example, when summer comes and we fear that moths might damage our woollen clothing, we use insect repellent to kill these insects and we warn our children not to go near this repellent or eat it. Insect repellent should not be eaten, yet it is beneficial because it kills harmful insects.

The same is true of the disinfectant which we buy and keep in bottles in our homes so we can use them to clean with. We warn our children to keep away from it because it is harmful, yet, it is useful for cleaning the house of insects. The same is the case for all those creatures for whom we do not know the wisdom of their creation. God created them to serve a special purpose, and so we should not transfer something from its own purpose to that of something else.

If mankind has not yet discovered the purpose of some creatures, then there are many things they do not know, and every day they discover another secret about God's creatures. For example, there is a fish which grows no bigger than a finger's knuckle, never getting any larger, and they were clueless as to its benefits. But when we went to Saudi Arabia, and saw places where the drinking water might be thought to be in danger of going stagnant, we found that this kind of fish was abundant there. We asked about this, and they told us that it never grows but stays the same size, and it cleans the water in places where people do not clean it themselves. We tested what they said, and threw some leftover food into the water, and the fish came from all over to eat it, and did not stop until they had finished it all.

And so the Living, All-Sustaining Lord creates creatures to look after other creatures, and He *the Exalted* says to mankind: Do not eat this, but eat this instead; and we might not know the wisdom behind this.

Another example: the bird called the white egret was known as the friend of the farmer; the role it played in life was to eat all the insects and worms when the earth was irrigated. And when this bird disappeared because of the use of pesticides, the danger posed to crops by worms, especially roundworm, became excessive. It was a Divine balance, perfectly designed. The same is the case with flies: some people ask what the purpose of their existence is, not knowing that flies play an important role for mankind by eating disease carrying garbage; and if people guarded themselves with cleanliness, they would not be bothered by flies.

So everything in existence is arranged in a precise order, the order of a Wise, All-Knowing Creator. As long as it was the All-Wise who created, no one should object and ask why He created such-and-such because every creature serves its purpose in the universe. And so the Creator tells mankind – believers and disbelievers alike – to eat what is lawful and good on earth. He says to the disbeliever: If you reflect on things, you will see that everything I have commanded you to do is for your own good; and even if you do not believe, I will guide you to what is good for you. So eat nothing but that which is lawful and good, and look to what the believers have been permitted to eat, and eat the same.

History and experience has shown that the disbelievers resort to following God's teachings in many things in order to solve problems in their lives – not

following God's religion as a religion, but following God's commands as a system. If those who disbelieve in God have any wisdom even where their worldly matters are concerned, they will take what God commanded those who believe in Him and follow it.

Here follows an example of this: The True Lord *the Most High* made unlawful the meat of dead animals, that is those animals which die without being slaughtered; and such meat is damaging to the health because blood vessels in animals and all living things are of two kinds: veins and arteries. Before the blood reaches the kidneys or the lungs, it is impure blood, and when we slaughter an animal all of the blood, impure or not, comes out of it, and the meat becomes purified. But if an animal is not slaughtered, it is not purified from this impure blood, and this is harmful to one's health.

When the True Lord *the Most High* says 'O mankind,' it is as though He is saying to the non-believers: 'If you use your reason, you will surely be prudent enough not to eat anything except that which God has made lawful to the believers.'

God's teaching '...and do not follow the footsteps of Satan...' means do not walk behind Satan. A footstep (*khatwa*) is the space between one's two feet when one is walking, i.e. between one step and the other. So do not make Satan your leader because Satan's enmity towards you is already established, and so you must be prudent and always mistrust him. He is the one who disobeyed his Lord, and so he cannot be obeyed in anything he commands: '...indeed, he is to you a clear enemy.' The enmity of Satan towards mankind goes all the way back to the days of Adam *peace be upon him*. The True Lord *the Most High* then says, about the commands of Satan:

﴿إِنَّمَا يَأْمُرُكُمْ بِالسُّوءِ وَالْفَحْشَاءِ وَأَنْ تَقُولُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ مَا لَا نَعْلَمُونَ﴾

He always commands you to do what is evil and indecent, and to say things about God that you do not really know [169] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 169)

'Evil' in this verse means every kind of misdeed that has no specified legal punishment, such as backbiting and tale-bearing; and 'immorality' means those sins which have a prescribed legal punishment in Islam. And Satan commands you to say about God things of which you have no knowledge.

The True Lord then says:

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمُ اتَّبِعُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا بَلْ نَتَّبِعُ مَا أَلْفَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ ءَابَاءَنَا
 أَوَلَوْ كَانُوا ءَابَاءَهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٧٠﴾

But when it is said to them, ‘Follow the message that God has sent down,’ they answer, ‘We follow the ways of our fathers.’ What! Even though their fathers understood nothing and were not guided? [170] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 170)

This verse concerns an important matter for Islamic society, namely the way people imitate the customs of their forefathers. Imitation is a natural phenomenon for mankind because when a person comes into existence with the power of life, this power wants to act, and its actions are always identical to the actions it sees around it. A young baby only knows that its hand can grasp things because it sees people around it doing the same; and when a baby wants to move, it copies the movements of those around it. And so children always imitate their parents in most of their actions; and when a child lives amongst different generations of his family of different ages, you will find that his basic actions are a mixture of imitations of these generations: he imitates his grandfather, his grandmother, his mother and father, and his siblings so that his different actions represent all these generations.

And so when a child grows up in an extended family consisting of parents and grandparents, this presents him with a model for mankind of natural life which is connected to both worldly works and religious teachings. If a child lives with his father alone, he might find that he is busy with his worldly work that might bring him away from moral or religious values; but if he sees his own father’s father, his grandfather, who has retired from worldly work and has devoted himself to morality and religion because he feels that he will soon meet God so that even if he did not pray when he was young, he will pray now, and if before he did no good works, he will do them now – the child will see very dedicated worldly work and exertion from his father, and will find moral values and acts of worship from his grandfather. And so you might find that he aids his grandfather in his good works so that, when the child hears the

mue'dhdhin (caller to prayer) say 'God is Great,' he knows that his grandfather will want to pray and so he goes and gets the prayer-rug and spreads it out for him, and he imitates his grandfather. And if the child is a girl, we find her imitating her mother or her grandmother, putting a scarf on her head to pray. So the mixture of generations gives the best of both sides of life, the material side and the religious side; and this is why the True Lord *the Most High* reminds us of His blessings saying that He has given us through our spouses, children and grandchildren (*al-Nahl*: 72).

So, imitating previous generations is something natural. But when God calls people to follow what He has revealed to His messengers, He forbids them from following the customs of their forefathers because these might have become permeated by heedlessness or ignorance of the teachings of God, and so He *the Exalted* calls us and commands us to abandon those corrupted things and follow what He has revealed, and not to degenerate to the level of the lowly life, as worldly ways might change, but the way of God *the Most High* never changes; so, follow what He has revealed.

When people are challenged, they say, '...Rather, we will follow that which we found our fathers are doing.' This is a mere excuse, and if it were true and right, and in accordance with reality, God would not have sent more and more messages after having taught Adam *peace be upon him* everything He wanted from him; for if we truly followed everything which our forebears passed on to us, the sons of Adam would have done the same as Adam *peace be upon him* did, and their sons would have followed them, and so the teachings of God would have remained and been passed down without any alteration.

So, why do the teachings of God have to change? This shows that it is people who changed their ways, and so their claim '...we will follow that which we found our fathers doing' is a lie because had they truly followed what their forefathers were doing, God's teachings on earth would have remained alive and unaffected by the heedlessness of the people, and unaffected by the diversion of the people of earth away from the teachings of Heaven. And so this excuse of theirs reveals that they only followed those things that their forefathers did if it agreed with their caprice.

God's word 'Follow' means: Make what was revealed to you a guide, and follow it, and follow nothing besides it; for all that is besides the way of Heaven can only be the invention of the people of the earth which is an unreliable way to follow. Their words '...that which we found our fathers doing...' mean that we deemed everything we saw them doing appropriate to follow and imitate.

The True Lord *the Most High* tells them that this is incorrect, and that it is merely an excuse which is untruthful; and the fact that it is untruthful is shown by considering that if you were truly following the way of Heaven, this way would not have changed; this is the first point and the second is that, in many ways you differ from your forefathers, as when offspring have their own personality and identity, we find that they are very keen to differ, and we find that whole generations deteriorate: the father wants one thing and the son wants another. And so it is not right for them to say, '...Rather, we will follow that which we found our fathers doing...' because if this were true, God's way on earth would never have been contravened; rather, the way of God was changed because of the influence of human caprice. Moreover, we can see some differences between the behaviour of children and their parents, and we accept this saying, 'This is the natural way that each generation differs from the last,' that is, the Children get an identity of their own. And so the claim that the offspring were following their parents is a falsehood which does not represent reality.

The True Lord *the Most High* retorts to this because it is a mere excuse which is not backed up by even a shred of evidence, nor any proof from real life. He *the Exalted* says, '...Even though their fathers understood nothing, nor were they rightly guided?' That is, will they follow what their forefathers were doing even if their forefathers did not use their reason, nor were guided?

So, the response comes from two sides: from the side of reason, and the side of guidance; and each of these, reason and guidance, is ruled out for the forefathers in this verse. So you are following without thinking, and following blindly. A person should not obey anyone blindly unless it is someone whom he trusts has absolutely infallible insight, and this cannot exist between one human being and another. Absolute obedience should not be given to anything except God's guidance; and if you blindly trust someone whom you are sure has absolutely perfect and wise insight, this is an obedience which is both

enlightened and insightful because you are protecting yourself from the error of your own vision and the error of your insight by following He whom you believe possesses vision and insight which never err; and so this obedience is in no way blind.

So the True Lord *the Most High* alerts them to the fact that it does not make sense for them to say that they are merely following what they found their forefathers doing because their forefathers might well have acted without using their reason, and they might not have been rightly guided. If your forefather had used their reason or been rightly guided, it would have been right for you to follow them; not because you would be merely following your forefather, but because you would have been following reason and guidance.

Thus, we find that imitation is a false claim because you never imitate something which is equal to you, but rather, you follow those whom you believe to be wiser than you; if he is your equal, it is not right for you to imitate his every move, but rather you should submit his actions to your mind. And so God's commands to His servants are only obligatory upon them once their minds have reached maturity – He *the Exalted* does not take the mind unawares before it has matured, but rather, God does not hold any of His servants to be morally accountable unless their intelligence has matured, and He does not hold them to be accountable unless they have intelligence, and He does not hold them to be accountable unless they have power behind their intelligence; and so if a person has strength and intelligence, they are accountable. He *the Exalted* only holds people accountable for their actions if they have mature minds and the ability to perform that which their minds guide them to; that is, without being forced.

And so the One Who holds mankind accountable according to these principles knows that if the mind is found mature and unforced, it will naturally be guided to the truth. The True Lord *the Most High* does not hold a person accountable until all of his faculties are fully formed because the final faculty which is formed in the human being is his sexual instinct, i.e. his ability to procreate, and to preserve the life of his species. We said before that the fruit we eat does not become ripe and tasty until after it fulfils its primary purpose; its purpose is not merely that man should eat it, but rather that, the seeds

inside it are ready to extend the life of its species. Once the seeds are formed, the fruit is ready to be eaten. The same is true of mankind: he is not ready to reproduce until he reaches the age of maturity. God *the Most High* has made the sexual instinct extremely strong, because the life that comes as a result of it is filled with the difficulties and strains of childrearing; had God not linked it with this pleasure, many people would not have bothered with it, but He *the Exalted* linked it with pleasure so that there would be a strong and voracious need for man to extend the life of his species.

So, the True Lord *the Most High* does not surprise man with moral responsibility before first preparing him properly for it; for were He to hold him accountable before his instincts matured, and before he had the power to extend the life of his species, man would say, ‘God has made me morally responsible before I had this inclination,’ and so the pact of faith would not be properly made.

The True Lord *the Most High* withholds moral responsibility from His servants until their minds and instincts have both matured so that a person can enter into the sphere of moral responsibility with all of his potency and all of his instincts and emotional responses so that when he makes a pact of faith with God, he will be fully aware of its implications and he can live up to this pact.

So the True Lord *the Most High* wants to develop man’s identity as soon as he is able to reproduce; and as soon as he has a complete identity, the True Lord *the Most High* wants to prevent him from blindly following any teaching. This is why no one should say, ‘I will do whatever my father did.’ But there are those who say, ‘...we will follow that which we found our fathers doing.’ But why do they follow their fathers only in their false ways, and not follow them in all other matters of worldly life as well, such as clothes, food, and all the other areas of life?

So, they only followed what they found their fathers doing because they found things about it which agreed with their whims which is proved by the fact that there were certain instances when they did not follow what they found their fathers doing because they did not agree with them; and as long as they differed with them in many things, why did they follow them in their false religion?

God *the Most High* wants to rescue mankind from the clutches of this imitation, and He says to His servants: Use your reason since you have your own

identity, and let each of you know that because his intellect is mature, he should be guided to the One Unique Creator. If you followed the example of your father at first because he provided for you and raised you, then this father is only a means which God provided for you, but God is your Creator, and He has revealed to you the way which you should follow in order that your life is fruitful and good. He *the Exalted* enjoins on all people to fear the Day on which no parent will be of any avail to his child, nor a child to his parent (*Luqman*: 33).

The True Lord *the Most High* explains this matter to us in great detail. If the fathers did not use their reason, what would be the position of their offspring? The offspring should correct themselves by following the way of the True Lord *the Most High*. There is a verse in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida* which phrases the same concept in a different way. Here in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, God *the Most High* says, 'And when it is said to them, "Follow what God has revealed ..."' while the verse in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida* says that when they are told to come to that which God has revealed and to the Messenger, they say that sufficient for them is that which they found their fathers doing; even though their fathers knew nothing and were not rightly guided? (*al-Ma'ida*: 104).

The verses are similar in some ways and different in others. Here, God *the Most High* says, '...Follow what God has revealed...' which means that we should be careful to implement God's teachings; while the verse in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida* says, '...Come to that which God has revealed and to the Messenger...' (*al-Ma'ida*: 104). This is the first difference. The second difference between the two verses is the answer given by the disbelievers in each to the words of the True Lord *the Most High*. Here in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, they say, '...Rather, we will follow that which we found our fathers doing....' This statement is in itself objectionable; but in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida* they say that sufficient for them is that which they found their fathers doing (*al-Ma'ida*: 104). This means that they were content with what they had, and rejected the idea of following the guidance of Heaven; and this is an even firmer and more rigid refusal. And so we find that in this verse the True Lord *the Most High* does not say to them 'follow' but rather says 'come,' that is, rise from the depths where you now find yourselves to faith in the

guidance of Heaven. As long as you have said ‘sufficient for us’ with a full mouth, this means you have sufficed yourselves with what you have. The phrase ‘sufficient for us’ (*hasbuna*) has a subtle meaning because when someone says this, it means he has calculated (in Arabic: *hasiba*) his words and that he is sufficed. The word *hisab* means precise calculation or measurement, and it implies the idea of counting and enumerating. So when they said ‘sufficient for us...’ it means that they had weighed things up and considered themselves sufficed. We find that every time this word is mentioned in the Quran, it either refers to a physical, numeric measure, or else it means a measure of perception and supposition. We find the same term used in the rhetorical question that the True Lord *the Most High* puts forth as to whether people suppose (*hasiba*) that by claiming that they have belief, they would be left without being put to test (*al-‘Ankabut* :2). This means, do the people suppose that they will be left alone without their faith being tested? This measure is not about numbers, but it is rather about thought, and such a measure might be incorrect, which is why we call it ‘supposition.’

We also find it in another question put forth by the True Lord *the Most High* to all mankind whether they think (*hasibtum*) that He created them in mere idle play, and that they would not have to return to Him (*al-Mu‘minun*: 115).

So the word *hisab* sometimes indicates something counted and measured, and sometimes it has an abstract meaning. We know it by its verbal form: the form (*hasaba/yahsibu*) means to count, while the form (*hasiba/yahsabu*) means to suppose.

The verb has perfect and imperfect forms, and if you mean numerical counting, about which people cannot differ, you say (*hasaba*) in the perfect tense and (*yahsibu*) in the imperfect, while if you mean supposition, about which there can be difference of opinion, you say (*hasiba*) in the perfect tense and (*yahsabu*) in the imperfect.

When the True Lord *the Most High* speaks about the Reckoning (*Hisab*) of the Hereafter, this means that something will be counted. If something is counted with special vigilance, however, it is called *husban*, which is an emphatic form like *ghufran* (to forgive (*ghafara*) completely) or *shukran*

(‘to thank (*shakara*) profusely). The word *husban* means a very precise account which never errs.

And so the True Lord *the Most High* uses the word *husban* about precise things which were created with a precise measure and order, such that if anything interferes with them, there will be a disturbance in the universe. He says that He the Lord of Mercy has taught the Quran, has created man and taught him eloquence, and has made the sun and the moon run by precise calculation (*ar-Rahman*: 1-5).

That is, the universe runs according to a very precise order, which must never be disturbed; for if the slightest disturbance were to occur in the course of the sun or moon, the order of the universe would be spoiled. Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* did not say that the sun and the moon run according to a measure (*hisab*), but rather, He said that they run by a precise calculation (*husban*). Moreover, there is a difference between the words *husban*, ‘precise calculation,’ and *mahsub bilhusban* (‘measured with precise calculation’). The True Lord *the Most High* says that He is the cleaver of daybreak and has made the night for rest and the sun and moon for calculation (*al-An'am*: 96). He did not say ‘according to a precise calculation’ because in itself, it is used for calculation and measurement, that is, its measure is automatic.

The word is used in a different way in the chapter of *al-Kahf*, when God *the Most High* tells of how the righteous man warned his haughty neighbour saying that God may send a *husban* (‘calamity’) upon his garden, the source of his pride, from the sky (*al-Kahf*: 40). Here, the word *husban* is used to mean ‘calamity’. This means a punishment which is commensurate to the wrongdoing, and so this too is a kind of measure.

Their statement that sufficient for them is that which they found their fathers doing is outwardly more emphatic than their assertion ‘...we will follow that which we found our fathers doing’ but each phrase is appropriate for the context in which it appears. The imperative ‘follow’ suits the answer ‘we shall follow...’ and the call to them to ‘come to...’ (*al-Ma'ida*: 104) suits their reply that sufficient for them is that which they found their fathers doing (*al-Ma'ida*: 104). That is what we have already is enough for us, and we want nothing else.

From this, we can understand why God *the Most High* uses in the verse in the Chapter of *al-Baqara* the imperative ‘Follow,’ while in the chapter of *al-Ma’ida* He *the Exalted* uses ‘Come to...,’ and why their response in the chapter of *al-Baqara* is ‘...Rather, we will follow that which we found our fathers doing,’ while in the chapter of *al-Ma’ida* it is ‘sufficient for us....’

There is a third difference between the two verses: the verse in *al-Baqara* says, ‘...Even though their fathers understood nothing...?’ while in *al-Ma’ida* it says: even though their fathers knew nothing (*al-Ma’ida*: 104). So the difference is between ‘understood nothing’ and ‘knew nothing.’

What is the difference between understanding and knowing? Understanding means that something was produced by their thought and reflection on things; but there are people who do not know how to use their reason, and so they accept everything that those who can use their reason tell them.

So, the one who merely knows is at a lower degree than the one who understands and uses his reason because the one who uses his reason, has deduced something for himself, while the one who knows has just taken his knowledge from someone else. For example, an illiterate person might learn a particular fact from someone else, but he does not deduce it for himself. So to say that someone has no knowledge is stronger than saying he does not understand because to say he has no knowledge means that he knows nothing at all, whether he learned from someone else or deduced for himself.

When the True Lord *the Most High* says that they ‘understood nothing,’ this means that they might have had some knowledge; but when He says that they ‘knew nothing,’ this affirms that they neither used their reason nor had any knowledge at all; and this is a sufficient answer to their statement. When they said, ‘...Rather, we shall follow...’ they are described as being people who ‘...understood nothing...’ and when they said ‘Sufficient for us...’ He described them as being people who ‘knew nothing,’ just like animals.

From what we have said, we can conclude that there are three differences between these verses: In the first verse, God *the Most High* used the verb ‘Follow,’ and they responded by saying ‘...Rather, we shall follow...’ and the response to this was ‘...Even though their fathers understood nothing....’

In the second verse, He *the Exalted* uses the verb ‘Come to...,’ and they responded ‘Sufficient for us’ and the response to this was ‘...even though their forefathers knew nothing?...’ (*al-Ma’ida*: 104).

And so we see that each verse is harmonised so that no one can say: ‘One verse has its form, and the other has another form.’ Rather, each verse uses the form which is most appropriate for its content, and every verse in the Quran is harmonised in its words, phrases, and context.

God *the Most High* says, ‘And when it is said to them...’ in the passive voice, in order to include every saying of this kind made by any of God’s messengers when they began to preach their messages. It is not something which applies to this time only, but rather, it has been said before. Or, it means that whenever any messenger said to them, ‘...Follow what God has revealed...’ they said, ‘...Rather, we will follow that which we found our fathers doing.’ Even though their fathers understood nothing, nor were they rightly guided?’

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by saying, ‘...nor were they rightly guided?’ and so too, the verse in *al-Ma’ida* concludes with the same so that we would know that the guidance of Heaven does not differ, whether understanding or knowledge is concerned. The first one ends with His questioning ‘...Even though their fathers understood nothing, nor were they rightly guided?’ while the second ends with His words ‘...even though their fathers knew nothing and were not rightly guided? (*al-Ma’ida*: 104). This indicates that the guidance of Heaven is not different for those who use their reason than it is for those who have knowledge.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَمَثَلُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا كَمَثَلِ الَّذِي يَنْعِقُ بِمَا لَا يَسْمَعُ إِلَّا
دُعَاءَ وَنِدَاءَ صُمُّكُمْ عَنْهُمْ فَهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٧١﴾

**Calling to disbelievers is like a herdsman calling to things
that hear nothing but a shout and a cry: they are deaf,
dumb, and blind, and they understand nothing [171]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 171)**

The shepherd’s cry is the shout he gives to his flock, and so this word gives us the image of a shepherd tending his flock. The shepherd would give

this cry to tell the animals to walk behind him; and he does not tell them in words what he wants from them, but rather makes noises to tell them. He would walk in front of them so that they would follow him to the grazing land or to a water source. So the shout was only a cry and a call, but the intention of the shout was to give a directional command to which the animals would respond. So it is as though the tended animals do not understand anything the shepherd says except as cries and calls. Cries and calls to what purpose? They do not understand the point of it, but they have the shepherd in front of them to show them which way to go. And so we see that we have here a shepherd, and a flock, and a shout from the shepherd which is nothing but a cry and a call. These three represent for us the Messenger; when he calls, he is the 'shepherd.' Who does he call? He calls the 'flock,' which represents the people. To what does he call the flock? Does he call them just so they will come, or does he call them that they come, and then command them with something? He commands them to follow the way of Heaven. This is the difference between the shepherd who tends sheep and the shepherd who tends people.

So, when the Messenger goes to them and says, 'O people, I am a messenger and a warner to you,' this is the call; and the essential content of this call is 'Worship God.' 'Reflect upon the heavens and the earth;' 'obey these commandments and prohibitions': this is what the Messenger wants.

So, the Messenger is like the shepherd in that they both make a call, and their flocks are alike in that they understand nothing but cries and calls, but when it comes to responding: '...deaf, dumb, and blind....' So the one called does not hear the call and so it is as though they share an animal nature in that they hear nothing but cries and calls, while not understanding the content of that to which they are called. And they are dumb in that they do not utter the requirement of this call, which is the testimony that there is no god but God *the Glorious and Exalted* and that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of God. And they have no reason to control the movement of their eyes so that they might reflect on the realm of the heavens and the earth to guide them to the truth of this matter.

So, those who disbelieve in the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* are like animals with their shepherd; they hear nothing but cries, just as the

animals hear the cries of the shepherd, but do not understand them. The difference is that the animals are not asked to respond to those who call them, and they do not pay heed to anything but the call; and so the disbelievers are the worst of all beasts.

God *the Most High* says, 'Deaf,' i.e. afflicted with deafness, which is an ailment which prevents the ear from performing its function; and 'dumb,' i.e. afflicted with an ailment which damages the tongue and prevents it from performing its function. Yet, the cause of deafness is an active cause since it means that something has damaged the tools of hearing so that you cannot hear. And because of this deafness, they are also dumb which means the inability of the tongue to speak; this is because when a person never hears a word, he will not be able to speak. And so if a person grows up in an Arabic-speaking environment he will speak Arabic, while if he grows up in an English-speaking environment he will speak English. Imagine if you had grown up in an Arabic-speaking environment, but you had never heard a word of it: would you be able to speak it? No. And so the tongue speaks what the ear hears, and if the ear does not hear, the tongue will not speak. Deafness comes before dumbness, and so dumbness is a negative ailment. You find that the tongue moves and produces sounds, but these sounds are meaningless. So should we understand from God's word 'deaf' that they are really afflicted with deafness? No; the True Lord *the Most High* is saying that the ear was made to hear beneficial things; so, if it does not do this, it is as good as deaf. Likewise, the tongue was made to utter beneficial speech; and so if it does not do this, it is as good as useless, and its owner is as good as dumb. And the mind was made to reason and reflect; and so if it does not reason in a sound and logical manner, it is as though its owner has no mind at all. So the one who really is deaf is better off than the one who possesses the means to hear, but comprehends nothing because the one who is really deaf has his excuse and so does the one who is really dumb; and the insane person also has his excuse. It would be better for these disbelievers if they were the same; for they made their own ears deaf to the call, and made themselves dumb so that they could not utter that which would give them salvation: 'There is no god but God, and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of God,' and they made themselves blind to the signs of God in the universe, for

had they possessed true sight they would have reflected on the universe, as God *the Most High* says that indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the succession of night and day, there are messages for all who are endowed with insight (*Al- 'Imran*: 190).

Had they reflected on the creation of the heavens and the earth, they would have been guided by their natural disposition to the realisation that this perfectly designed, orderly universe has a Maker; but they did not use their reason because reason can only develop after you have first heard, and used your senses properly. This is because a human being, in its first stage of development, is a being of simple action and sensation: he sees, hears, tastes; and then after this, his rational faculties start to develop.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُلُوا مِن طَيِّبَاتِ مَا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ
وَأَشْكُرُوا لِلَّهِ إِن كُنتُمْ إِيَّاهُ تَعْبُدُونَ

**You who believe, eat the good things We have
provided for you and be grateful to God, if it is Him
that you worship [172] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 172)**

This is an address from God to those who believe, telling them to eat of the good things. In verse 168 there was a similar address on the same subject, but it was addressed to all mankind: ‘O mankind, eat from whatever is on earth [that is] lawful and good...’ (*al-Baqara*: 168). We said that when the True Lord *the Most High* addresses all mankind, He is drawing their attention to the matter of faith; but when He addresses the believers alone, He is giving them the commandments of faith. God only issues commands to those who believe in Him; and to those who do not believe in Him, He issues no commands; for belief is commitment, and if you have committed yourself to the fact that He is a Wise God, then take from Him the laws of your religion.

God’s justice necessitates that He not hold anyone morally accountable except those who believe in Him, which is in contradistinction to the human practise; for the commands of human rulers apply to both those who accept

their rule and those who do not. If a human ruler has any power, he uses it to force all those under his rule to do as he says.

God's address to the believers is worded thus: 'O you who believe, eat of the good things which we have provided for you....' This is because the believer is completely certain that God is the Creator, and that He is the One who provides all sustenance. God *the Most High* concludes the noble verse by saying, '...and give thanks to God if you indeed worship Him.' It is essential that the believing servant thanks the Creator Lord since he wishes to dedicate his worship to God Alone.

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

إِنَّمَا حَرَّمَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَيْتَةَ وَالْدَّمَ وَلَحْمَ الْخِنْزِيرِ وَمَا أُهْلَ بِهِ لِغَيْرِ اللَّهِ
فَمَنْ اضْطُرَّ غَيْرَ بَاغٍ وَلَا عَادٍ فَلَا إِثْمَ عَلَيْهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

He has only forbidden you carrion, blood, pig's meat, and animals over which any name other than God's has been invoked. But if anyone is forced to eat such things by hunger, rather than desire or excess, he commits no sin: God is most merciful and forgiving [173] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 173)

We find that the basic Arabic word (*mawt*) ('death') has many words derived from it, such as *mayyit*, *mayyita*, and *mayta*. For example, the True Lord *the Most High* speaks of the wind carrying rain laden clouds that He drives towards a *mayyit* ('dying') land (*Fatir*: 9).

The word *mayyit* ('dead' or 'dying') means someone/something that will end in death even if it is still alive for the moment, so every one of us can be said to be dying, that is, bound to die; and so God *the Most High* says to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that he is *mayyit* (bound to die) and, surely, they, too, are bound to die (*az-Zumar*: 30). So the word *mayyit* means that you are 'bound to die,' even if you are alive at the moment. As for the word *mayt*, without the doubled letter 'y', this means that someone/something is actually dead. An line of an Arabic poem says:

The dead is but he who is borne to the grave.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘He has only forbidden to you carrion (flesh of animals that died of themselves), blood....’ Had He said *mayyita*, we would have said that everything that will one day die would thereby be forbidden. But God is talking here about *mayta*, which means something which has already died, and whose spirit has left its body naturally – for the spirit can be removed deliberately, which is what happens when you slaughter an animal so it dies; but some creatures die of natural causes, and when animals die of natural causes, the traces of the food they had been taking in is retained within them in their blood, and this blood contains many harmful things. The blood contains harmful impurities which the body would have cleansed itself of were it still alive, and which were on their way to being removed. But when we slaughter the animal, all of the blood, both the pure and the impure, runs out. And since preventing harm should be prioritised over seeking benefit, we give up the pure blood along with the impure blood. This blood is retained within the body upon a natural death, and these harmful things remain within it so that the meat becomes filled with harmful material which can cause diseases in those who eat it. By simply looking at two chickens, one of which has been slaughtered so that its blood has all run out and the other of which has been strangled so that its blood has not run out, we find a clear difference in colour; and if we cook them both, we will find a clear difference in taste, and the taste of the slaughtered chicken will be acceptable while the taste of the dead chicken will not. Even those who did not believe in any god or any religion used to slaughter animals before eating them. Why? Their experience had guided them to the fact that this method was the most beneficial, even though they did not know the proper Islamic method of slaughter.

When God *the Most High* forbade ‘carrion,’ there was no need for any of us to answer the question on God’s behalf as to why He made it unlawful. It is enough that God said it was forbidden; and as long as He provided for you and then said, ‘Do not eat this,’ He has only excluded it from the beneficial sustenance He has provided. Even if we do not know of any harm in it, He *the Exalted* said, ‘Do not eat it,’ so do not eat it. He is the One Who provided, and He is the One Who created you, and He is the One Who commands you not to eat it; and so it is not your right to ask why it has been forbidden for you.

Suppose that we were not guided to the discovery of the wisdom behind a certain prohibition, and we had no idea of the harm that afflicts people when they eat carrion: Would people ignore the prohibition until they knew the reason for it, or would they unthinkingly obey God's commands? The believers hear God's commands and obey them without hesitation.

So, since God addresses us, the simple fact of our faith should be enough for us to accept His rulings, and the only reason for accepting the ruling is that it came from He Who rules. As for knowing the reason behind the ruling, this is a matter of comfort for the mind, and a reassurance that God would not command us to do something unless it was good for us. The believer should not make his faith dependant on the knowledge of these reasons.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'He has only forbidden to you carrion...' The verse is unequivocal in its prohibition of all carrion; and if it is carrion, this means that it had life and a spirit within it, but then they came out of it. But we eat fish even though it is dead; and this is a clarification from the Sunna about a general matter mentioned in the Quran. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'Two dead things are lawful for you to eat: fish and locusts, as well as two kinds of blood: the liver and the spleen.'⁽¹⁾

Why are these things accepted? They are accepted because convention has a role in defining the words of the Lawgiver. If you vow not to eat meat, and then you eat fish, have you broken your oath? No; your oath remains unbroken even though God described fish as being fresh meat because the conventional definition of meat does not include fish.

So, convention has some importance which is why Az-Zamakhshari, author of the book *Al-Kashshaf*, says about this, 'If you vow not to eat meat and then you eat fish, the consensus of the scholars is that you have not broken your vow. He also gives another example, saying that if you vow to ride a mount (*dabba*), which also means 'creature' – and God *the Most High* used this word ('creatures') in referring to disbelievers whom He describes as the vilest creatures in the sight of God (*al-Anfal*: 55) – is it permissible for

(1) Narrated by Ash-Shafe'i, Ahmad, Ibn Maja, Ad-Daraqutni, Al-Hakim, and Al-Bahaqi on the authority of Ibn 'Umar.

you to ride a disbeliever? It is not permissible, even though the outward sense of the verse seems to say that you can. He commented on this: ‘It is true that a ‘mount’ (*dabba*) can mean literally everything that walks (*yadubb*) on the earth, but convention deems it to mean specifically four-legged creatures.’

So, convention does have a role to play in the matter of the lawful and unlawful. If someone says, ‘God has forbidden carrion, yet fish and locusts are carrion, so why are we allowed to eat them?’ we reply: Convention says that fish and locusts are not meat, which can be seen by considering the popular saying: ‘If locusts are many, meat becomes cheap.’ This means that locusts are distinct from meat.

As for fish, they are not like the carrion which God forbids because the carrion which is forbidden, is all that which could be slaughtered; so, all its blood runs out, and fish do not have blood of this kind. Locusts, too, do not have blood of this kind, and so the reason it can be eaten even when dead of natural causes is that it does not have this same flowing blood which can cause the harmful things in it to be transferred to those who eat it. Likewise, the liver and the spleen are not really blood since blood flows, while the liver and spleen are solid pieces of meat, the remainder of the blood from which the constituents of the liver and spleen are formed.

So, the Sunna has the role of clarifying the lawful and unlawful. God’s words ‘He has only forbidden to you carrion (flesh of animals that died of themselves), blood...’ mean that He has forbidden it because of the way that the blood remains in carrion and does not run out of it, and so a priori, blood must also be forbidden. The True Lord *the Most High* also forbade ‘...the flesh of swine...’ We said that the reason to obey the law is that God is the One Who commanded it; and if the passage of time has come to confirm the truth of these religious rulings, this is something which serves to reinforce faith. But if we were to wait, and postpone obedience to God’s commands until we had found the reason for them, we would be believers in scientists and scientific discoveries more than believers in God. If we waited until the scientists had their say, this would mean we considered the scientists to be more reliable than God; yet, is there any creature which is more reliable than the Creator? Such a thing is impossible. So the believer is the one who accepts every ruling

issued by God, convinced as he is that God would only command him with that which is good for him.

In reality, harmful things are not harmful in their essence since they might be beneficial in other ways. For example – and God is beyond compare – when you discipline your son in some way, withholding his pocket-money or not allowing him a particular treat, this punishment is not harmful in itself; rather, to shower him with everything he loves, even when he behaves badly, would only encourage him to continue behaving badly. To fail to properly discipline one's son with rewards and punishments would be harmful for him.

And so we say to those people who want to find a reason for every forbidden thing: You have not considered the notion of prohibition as a means of discipline. Something might be forbidden because it is harmful, and other things might be forbidden for another reason, such as discipline. It is not right for you to consider the principle of discipline as being of lesser importance than the principle of physical well-being. The True Lord *the Most High* is more merciful to His creatures than a father is to his son; and He forbade some of the good things of life to the Israelites as a way of disciplining them, as He *the Exalted* says that due to the wickedness of certain Jews, and due to their turning away from the Way of God, He forbade them certain good viands that had been before allowed them (*an-Nisa'*: 160).

So, the True Lord *the Most High* forbade them these good things to discipline them for the wrong they had done to themselves. So when you see something forbidden, do not automatically think that it must be forbidden because it is harmful, but rather consider whether it might be forbidden for the sake of discipline; for to allow some good things for these people while they were going against their religion, would have been an enticement for them to keep on contravening it, and keep on wronging themselves. The True Lord *the Most High* forbade that which is harmful to one's health, and he also forbade some good things to some sinners as a way of disciplining them.

As for the prohibition of pork, God *the Glorious and Exalted* willed to have the secret of this prohibition revealed to people, and so scientists confirmed that pork causes some illnesses which had not previously been known, and whose danger was clear to them, such as tapeworm. If the True Lord *the Most High*

revealed to them a single secret, the tapeworm, there may well be other secrets more dangerous than tapeworm yet to be discovered.

The True Lord *the Most High* also forbids ‘...that over which the name of other than God has been invoked....’ To ‘invoke’ (*ihlal*) literally means to raise the voice, and so the verb (*hallala*) means to raise one’s voice when saying ‘there is no god but God.’ And the new moon in Arabic is called *hilal* because when we see it we shout ‘God is Great! My Lord and your Lord is God.’ And when a child is born and leaves its mother’s womb, and becomes aware of its life and its own existence, after having been bound up within its mother’s existence, it cries out. It begins life by crying out, and so when those who are waiting for the baby to be born hear its cries, they relax. A poet said:

When the world bids him enter its realm of woes,
The child cries the moment it is born.

It is as though the child is starting something woeful, and it does not show any awareness of the breadth of the world and all the variety of life therein. If not, why should it cry when it has found something wider and more varied than it had before? It is as though the cries of the child are the cries of one who is forced to leave its mother’s womb and face life.

The life of the child in its mother’s womb was routine, and its sustenance came to it from the umbilical tube. But when it is separated from its mother, it is disconnected from the means by which its sustenance was carried to it in its mother’s womb, and it loses access to this sustenance the moment it comes out of its mother’s womb when it has not yet been given the sustenance of the breast. Breastfeeding is the sustenance of this world, and the child cannot take it until its first breath has circled through its lungs. And so the doctors always try to make sure the baby comes out head first because if it comes out feet first and its head is still inside, its breaths are trapped by its mother’s womb, and there is a risk of dying. And so nowadays, they can inspect the mother to determine the position of the foetus inside her and if needs be, they can perform a caesarean section to protect the life of the baby. The first thing the doctor does after the child is born is to clear its nasal passages, after which he treats the rest of the body.

It is an instinctive cry, just as is the case when his mother forgets to feed him and he cries. So we know that *ihlal* means to raise the voice, and when God *the Most High* says, '...that over which the name of other than God has been invoked...' this refers to the raising of the voice at the moment of slaughter. Slaughtering is of two kinds: you can slaughter in order to get meat for you and others to eat, or you can slaughter as a sacrifice for God. That over which God's name is invoked is a slaughter of sacrifice for God, while '...that over which the name of other than God has been invoked....' is a slaughter which is only made to benefit people, and an act of sacrifice for their idols and all that they worship besides God.

Since God is the One Who has given us animals and subdued them so that we can eat of them, we should remember this blessing of His; the primary intention should be that the sacrifice is for God Alone. And so the believers sacrifice and then eat, while the disbelievers just eat, and they do not sacrifice to God but rather they slaughter and sacrifice for their false gods.

When the True Lord *the Most High* issues rulings, His rulings always make allowances for contingencies; and this is not the case for human lawmakers who are always forced by circumstance to change their laws after having made them because things have happened after the laws are implemented which they did not anticipate when they made them. This is because they had no knowledge of things that might happen in the future which would force them to amend their laws. When a human law is changed, this means that cases occurred which could not be solved by the implementation of the law as it was, and so the lawmakers were forced to change the law in order to accommodate these cases.

But when the True Lord *the Most High* makes laws, He makes them in such a way that they accommodate any new situations which might come along without the need for the laws to be changed; and because Islam came as the final religion, after which no further guidance from Heaven would come, it is able to incorporate any possibility. It might have been logical for laws to be changed while the Messengers were still succeeding one another, but once God completed the messages of Heaven with Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, the laws which God sent through His Messenger had to be endowed with ways to accommodate this role. So, the things which force a lawgiver to

change his laws were unknown to him at the time he first made the law, but these things do not apply to the laws of Heaven because God has knowledge of everything that will come to pass.

Suppose that there were no developments which made it necessary to change the law, and then they appeared. Would the True Lord *the Most High* make all His creatures die because He had told them not to eat carrion? If this were the case, we would say: ‘What is this? It is true that carrion can be harmful, but hunger can kill; so, why can we not eat what might harm us rather than eat nothing at all and so die of starvation?’

The justice of the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...But whoever is driven by necessity, neither coveting it nor exceeding his need, there is no sin upon him....’ To be driven by necessity has two conditions: ‘...neither coveting it nor exceeding his need....’ ‘Nor exceeding his need’ means not to exceed the proper limit, but rather only to take what he needs; for example, one should not say, ‘God has made carrion lawful for someone in a desperate state such as I am in,’ and then fill his belly with it. No; he should just take enough to keep himself alive; and he should not think that it has become lawful, but rather, he should keep in mind that it is unlawful, but allowed in times of dire necessity.

Also, we should recognise the rights of others. Suppose that a person has only a glass of water which will do nothing but wet his throat, and then another person in a state of dire necessity who is stronger than him comes and hits him and takes this water from him. We say to this covetous person: Do not transgress, because someone else has prior ownership. If there is enough water for you both, then go ahead; but if there is not, then the owner of the water has more right to it. The other one should not say, ‘I am forced by necessity to take his water;’ by this he will only satisfy his need and cause someone else to suffer from it. So, at times of need, basic principles remain unchanged, and rights of ownership must be respected, and it is not right for us to go beyond the limits of our need. This is the meaning of God’s words ‘...But whoever is driven by necessity, neither coveting it nor exceeding his need, there is no sin upon him....’ God’s words ‘...there is no sin upon him’ indicate that there is a sin which has been made permissible by God in times of necessity. This is so that we do not make it lawful all the time; once the necessity has passed, we return to the original law.

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by saying, ‘...Indeed, God is Forgiving and Merciful.’ We might ask what ‘...Forgiving and Merciful’ has to do with the meaning of this verse. Forgiveness and mercy imply that there has been a sin; but what has gone before, is nothing but the word of the True Lord *the Most High* and His law; and the prohibition of carrion except at times of necessity is the law of the True Lord *the Most High*, and when one is forced by dire need to eat of it as much as he needs, he does so by permission of the True Lord *the Most High*. And so is there any sin, then, that would require the verse to conclude with the words: ‘...Indeed, God is Forgiving and Merciful’?

We say: If God forgives sins, will He not forgive the acts of dire necessity for which this law was made? Logic dictates that if God forgives sins which happen without any excuse, will He not forgive the person who is forced by circumstance to eat carrion? God is much-forgiving to begin with, and so will He not forgive those to whom He has given a dispensation? So, He is forgiving and merciful, and He adds no sin to the account of one who is forced by dire need. Out of His mercy God forgives the sinner who contravenes His law for no reason, and He will certainly forgive those who are forced by dire need to partake of what He has forbidden. Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَكْتُمُونَ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَيَشْتُرُونَ بِهِ
 ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا أُولَٰئِكَ مَا يَأْكُلُونَ فِي بُطُونِهِمْ إِلَّا النَّارَ وَلَا يُكَلِّمُهُمُ
 اللَّهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ وَلَا يُزَكِّيهِمْ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿١٧٤﴾

**As for those who conceal the Scripture that God sent down and
 sell it for a small price, they only fill their bellies with Fire.
 God will not speak to them on the Day of Resurrection, nor
 will He purify them: an agonizing torment awaits them [174]
 (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 174)**

The True Lord *the Most High* sends His messengers to His creatures so that His guidance will govern the actions and lives of people. He makes laws for the good of the people, and He makes laws against the people when they cause benefits for others to be missed out; for if one person causes another to lose some benefit, he should be aware that this other person will cause him to lose benefit in turn.

If legislation is to be fair, it should be for people and also against them so that every law which is ‘against’ a person is complemented by a law which is ‘for’ him; for if he has a right, his right is due to him from everyone else; and if his right is due to him from everyone else, he must also owe everyone else their own rights. If not, how could anyone claim their rights?

When the True Lord *the Most High* reveals His guidance, it is passed on by His messengers and then carried by those who are endowed with knowledge so they can convey it to the people. Those who suppress what God reveals are only attempting to resist the way of Heaven, and a person will only try to resist the way of Heaven if he desires to benefit from falsehood and usurp the rights of others. When they suppress what God has revealed, they become impediments in the Way of God which came to govern all aspects of life.

What do they stand to gain from this? There must be something for them to gain, and this gain of theirs is but a trifling gain, such as the bribes or other things they would take from their followers in exchange for making God’s laws follow the whims of people.

God *the Most High* is telling them: Nothing can be valued except by someone who knows the true significance of it; you are attempting to put a price on the way of God, but no one can put a price on the way of God except God Himself. And so the price, which God offers for the implementation of His way, must be a price which is profitable and convincing for you. Yet, if you take a price for suppressing the Way of God and pleasing the people with legislation that satisfies their caprices and desires, you will surely lose out; for however large this price might be in human terms, it is a paltry gain which lasts for a limited time.

Prices usually start with the basic things a person needs to sustain his life, namely food and drink; and so God *the Most High* says, ‘...those consume not into their bellies except the fire....’ If they will fill their bellies with fire, how will the reception of the fire be for all those bellies? For ‘the believer,’ as the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘eats to fill one stomach, while the disbeliever eats to fill seven stomachs.’ That is, the disbeliever only eats to gain enjoyment from his food, and he wants to enjoy it always so that his belly becomes filled with what he puts in it. The believer, however, should

take that food which he needs to survive. The master of mankind, Muhammad ibn Abdullah *peace and blessings be upon him*, said in a Noble Hadith, 'Sufficient for a Son of Adam should be a few morsels which meet his need.'⁽¹⁾

So, eating for the believer is for the purpose of sustaining life and fuelling action, but the disbeliever considers food to be nothing but a source of pleasure. The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...those consume not into their bellies except the fire....' That is, just as they wanted to fill their bellies for the sake of pleasure and enjoyment, God will make their punishment akin to the paltry gain they made; they took this gain in order to fill their bellies with foul things, and so God will fill their bellies with fire as a just requital for what they did. This punishment of a material nature is followed by another kind of punishment, as God *the Most High* says, '...And God will not speak to them....' That is, the True Lord *the Most High* will abandon them on a day when there is no means of comfort for any creature except with the Face of the True Lord.

When we hear that someone is not speaking to someone else, we feel that there is anger involved here, because speech is a sign of amiability for human beings. If someone refuses to speak to someone else, this indicates that he dislikes and abhors them. So '...God will not speak to them....' means that He abhors them; and it is punishment and torment enough for God to abandon His creatures. He gave them His blessings before, but now He forsakes them. Someone might say: How do we read here that the True Lord *the Most High* will not speak to them, when He *the Exalted* also tells us that on the Day of Reckoning, the disbelievers will say to Him that their ill-fortune had prevailed against them and they went astray. They will beg to be allowed to be let out and if they go back to their sins, they will indeed be wrongdoers. He will tell them to be driven down into it with ignominy and not to speak to Him (*al-Mu'minun*: 106-108).

We say: It is true that He *the Exalted* will tell them not to speak to Him; but when God says that He will not speak to the disbelievers, this means the speech of warmth, mercy, and tender kindness; as for the speech of punishment, this is a curse. So '...And God will not speak to them....' means

(1) Narrated by Al-Mundhiri in *At-Targhib wa At-Tarhib*, and by Az-Zubaidi in *Ithaf As-Sada Al-Muttaqin*, and by Al-Qurtubi in his *Tafsir*, and by Al-Kahhal in *Al-Ahkam An-Nabawiyya fi AS-Sina'a At-Tibbiyya*.

that the True Lord *the Most High* will not speak to them in a way that comforts them; for when God wishes to comfort some of His creatures, He speaks to them at length. For example, when Moses *peace be upon him* came to meet with his Lord, what did God *the Most High* say to him? He *the Exalted* asked him what he had in his right hand (*Ta Ha*: 17). Does this question mean that God *the Most High* needed Moses *peace be upon him* to tell Him what was in his hand? Rather, the question was meant to give the comfort of speech so that the fearful awe of Moses *peace be upon him* would be calmed.

We gave an example of this before – and God is beyond compare – of when a person goes to his friend's house to visit him, and his young son comes along with a toy in his hand, and so the visitor asks the child, 'What have you got there?' The visitor can see the toy in the boy's hand, but he speaks to him in order to be amiable with him. And so when God *the Most High* spoke to Moses *peace be upon him*, it was to comfort him, and He asked him what he had in his right hand.

It would have been enough for Moses *peace be upon him* to say, 'a staff,' and this would have answered the question; but had Moses *peace be upon him* simply said, 'a staff,' this would have been a failure to appreciate the comfort he derived from his conversation with God. And so our master Moses *peace be upon him* made the most of God's question so that he could draw out the comfort he felt from God, and so he said that it was his staff: he leans on it, and he beats down leaves with it for his sheep, and he has other uses for it (*Ta Ha*: 18).

Reflect on how Moses *peace be upon him* extended his answer: the words 'It is' are redundant, and the words 'I lean on it' are redundant, that is, not essential to answering the question; and the words '...and with it I beat down leaves for my sheep...' make the reply even longer, and then the words '...and other uses I have for it' show his desire to extend the conversation even further. So to speak with God and look upon Him *the Exalted* is the greatest of all the blessings He will give to the believers on the Day of Resurrection.

Thus if God will deny the disbelievers the means to material bounty and then not speak to them, this will be difficult indeed. '...And God will not speak to them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them. And they will have a painful punishment.' After denying them His conversation and the

comfort of His Presence, He will not cleanse them of the foul things they did, and He will not make them fit to draw near to Him. And after this, He will subject them to grievous suffering. It is as though there will first be suffering, after which will come suffering which is even more grievous; for they must be subjected to multiple suffering because they concealed God's Way from His creatures, and so caused them to go astray, and so they will bear the sin of their error and also further sins on top of their own because they led others into error.

The matter of God's speaking to people on the Day of Resurrection was related to us by the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* when he said:

There are three to whom God will not speak on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He cleanse them, nor will He look upon them, and grievous suffering will be theirs: An adulterous old man, and a lying king, and a proud pauper with family.⁽¹⁾

Why is it that these three will be denied God's speech, and His cleansing, and His looking upon them? The adulterous old man commits a sin which he has no need to commit since he does not suffer from the voracity of youth; and the lying king lies to his own subjects, and lying means fear of the truth – and so who does the king have to fear if the people are under his command? And when a family's provider suffers from pride while he is poor, this pride will cause him all kinds of problems and will make it hard for him to find ease and make a living, and will cause him to live in miserable poverty; and if anyone wants to help him, his pride will be a barrier between him and those who would help him. This is why God will not speak to them nor cleanse them. But why will He not look upon them? To look upon someone is to have compassion for them, and so the True Lord *the Most High* will cut off mercy and kindness from them from their very beginning which would be to look upon them.

The True Lord *the Most High* then concludes the noble verse by saying, '...And they will have a painful punishment,' i.e. grievous suffering; and when an adjective in Arabic has the form which the word 'painful' (*alim*) has here, it can be thought of either as an active or a passive form; and so we

(1) Narrated by Muslim in his *Sahih* on the authority of Abu Hurayra God be pleased with him.

understand the word ‘painful’ to mean really ‘grievous.’ Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ اشْتَرُوا الضَّلَالََةَ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَالْعَذَابَ
بِالْمَغْفِرَةِ ۚ فَمَا أَصْبَرَهُمْ عَلَى النَّارِ ﴿١٧٥﴾

These are the ones who exchange guidance for error, and forgiveness for torment. What can make them patient in the face of the Fire? [175] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 175)

God *the Most High* here tells us the reason why this judgement has been passed over them, and why He will not speak to them, and why He will not cleanse them, and why they will be subjected to grievous suffering in the Hereafter: they took error in exchange for guidance, and suffering in exchange for forgiveness. When you see the severity of the punishment, do not find it too severe, but rather consider the enormity of the crime. When people separate the crime from the punishment, they feel sympathy for the criminal because they only see the criminal when he is tried and convicted, and forget about his crime. And so when you see a punishment and find it horrific, you should call to mind the crime which has necessitated this punishment. We find that people often sympathise with criminals who are given stern punishments because the crime took place long before and we did not see it, and its effects and repercussions are finished so that only the criminal remains, and so people feel sympathy for them. This is why it is wrong that legal proceedings take so long. Rather, criminals should be tried immediately, while the crime is still recent so that the people do not sympathise with them because the sympathy of the people for them makes their punishment seem harsh.

‘It is they who have taken error in exchange for guidance....’ We know that ‘in exchange’ refers to the thing which is left, and so here error has been taken and guidance has been left, and in turn suffering has been exchanged for forgiveness. Since they have taken error in exchange for guidance, and suffering instead of forgiveness, it is only just that they are subjected to a grievous suffering as punishment for this.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says, ‘...how great their endurance in the fire!’ This is a way of showing the severity of the punishment so that the people

will avoid it. God wants us to wonder at how the misguided person can reject guidance and accept error and, as a result, bring suffering upon himself instead of mercy. What has given him this hope that he will be able to withstand Hellfire? Does he have such fortitude that he can carry out sins that will send him to the fire? What will make him able to bear this suffering? Does he have some kind of power to withstand the fire? What is this power?

It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* were saying: You have no idea what requital awaits you; and if so, then what will make you able to bear this fire? You insist upon your wrongdoing and error, and you forget that hell will be your punishment. If you were convinced that hell would be your requital, how could you be so sure that you will be able to bear it? hell is something that no man could ever bear.

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ نَزَّلَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ اخْتَلَفُوا فِي الْكِتَابِ لَفِي شِقَاقٍ بَعِيدٍ ﴿١٧٦﴾

This is because God has sent the Scripture with the Truth; those who pursue differences in the Scripture are deeply entrenched in opposition [176] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 176)

‘That is’ is a reference to what has just passed; and what has just passed is the error which they took in exchange for guidance, and the suffering which they took in exchange for forgiveness, and the fire in which they will suffer, and which they seem to fear little. So there are three interlinked things: suffering, error, and hellfire.

Error is the primary reason for the suffering, and so if God says that He will punish them with such-and-such because of their error, this is true; and if He says that He did such and-such to them because they deserved punishment, this is true. And generally speaking, this punishment will be by fire.

So, when the True Lord *the Most High* speaks about the fire, or about suffering, or about error, all as being one thing, He says, ‘That is [deserved by them] because God has sent down the Book in truth,...’ and those who would try to alter and suppress the Book only do so because they hate the truth, and ‘...indeed, those who differ over the Book are in extreme dissension.’ It is a

wide chasm they fall into, as errors of religious values represent a huge chasm. If the error had only concerned a material matter, mankind could have been left to sort it out amongst themselves, and it would have been easily resolved; but error concerning moral matters cannot be solved by mankind alone. And so the gulf of this error is wide, and no one can close it but God. This is why He *the Exalted* asserts that He will judge between them on Resurrection Day concerning all they differ on (*az-Zumar*: 3).

لَيْسَ الْبِرَّ أَنْ تُولُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ ءَامَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ
الْآخِرِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالْكِتَابِ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ وَءَاتَى الْمَالَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ ذَوِي الْقُرْبَى
وَالْيَتَامَى وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَأَبْنَى السَّبِيلِ وَالسَّائِلِينَ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَءَاتَى
الزَّكَاةَ وَالْمُؤْفِقَ بَعَثَهُمْ إِذَا عَاهَدُوا وَالصَّابِرِينَ فِي الْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَحِينَ
الْبَأْسِ ۗ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ ﴿١٧٧﴾

Goodness does not consist in turning your face towards East or West. The truly good are those who believe in God and the Last Day, in the angels, the Scripture, and the prophets; who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it, to their relatives, to orphans, the needy, travellers and beggars, and to liberate those in bondage; those who keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; who keep pledges whenever they make them; who are steadfast in misfortune, adversity, and times of danger. These are the ones who are true, and it is they who are aware of God [177] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 177)

When the command came from the True Lord *the Most High* to change the prayer-direction to the *Ka'ba* so that the Muslims would face it in prayer after having previously faced Jerusalem, this created disquiet; and now the followers of every faith had their own prayer-direction: the Muslims faced the *Ka'ba*, the Jews faced Jerusalem, and the Christians faced the east.

This verse confirms that the difference was not a simple matter of prayer-direction; before the prayer-direction was changed, everyone who prayed faced a certain direction, and the change of this direction required no effort.

The True Lord *the Most High* is saying to them: Do not suppose that turning to face the *Ka'ba* represents all of piety because this is not something which requires any effort. It was not difficult for the believers to face the *Ka'ba* after having faced Jerusalem, but rather, it was a matter of obeying the command of the Commander. Piety, therefore, is not about easy things which require no effort, but rather is about matters of great good. It includes faith, God-fearing, honesty, obedience and excellence; and all kinds of goodness are contained within the meaning of the word 'righteousness' (*birr*). The root meaning of *birr* is something large and wide; and since this is what it means, every aspect of it will require effort.

Consider the requirements of righteousness, and the implications of righteousness which require that you expend effort; and do not differ over something simple and easy which does not require the slightest effort such as the matter of the changed prayer-direction. If you think that this is what righteousness means, we say to you: No; righteousness has many different responsibilities, and the essence of righteousness is that the truth of one's faith is tested, and that one puts God's demands over his own comfort, and that the believer be eager to obey God even if it is difficult for him, and that the Muslim refrains from disobedience, and that he realises that disobedience may be pleasurable in the short run, but that its consequences are grave. These are the requirements of righteousness and faith; so, do not make the question of facing the *Ka'ba*, or Jerusalem, or the east, into the main issue because your faces can turn towards any direction, even without your being commanded to do so. As we know, righteousness is the immense good which covers all the kinds of beauty in the universe; and the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...but [true] righteousness is [in] one who believes....'

Why does God *the Most High* speak about righteousness as if it is a physical body even though piety is an abstract concept? The True Lord *the Most High* embodies this abstract concept, righteousness, in the being of the servant who believes because when He *the Most High* wants to emphasise a particular concept, He represents in it a concrete way. For example – and God is beyond compare – when we say 'So-and-so is just,' we describe him in a way which tells the listener that he is a man known for being just. But if we say he is

justice,’ it is as though he is justice personified. Likewise, when we say that So-and-so is honest, this means that he has a character which is marked by honesty, but that it might sometimes be possible for his character to be separated from this honesty; however, if we say that So-and-so is honesty, this means that honesty has become an integral part of him and can never leave him. Or, it may be that the True Lord *the Most High* wants to say to us: ‘But the one who has righteousness is he who believes.’ Or, He might be saying: ‘But true righteousness is the righteousness of one who believes.’ Or, the description of the being of the ‘one who believes’ as the attribute ‘righteousness’ might indicate that the attribute has become incarnate in the being such that it can never be separated from it so that righteousness has become embodied by such people.

The text of the Noble Quran is capable of bearing all these interpretations. The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...but [true] righteousness is [in] one who believes in God...’ This is the beginning of faith, and after this comes the ultimate concluding point of faith: ‘...the Last Day...’ The starting point is belief in God, and the concluding point is represented by belief in the Last Day.

Here it might be asked how belief in the Last Day is attained. We say that belief in the Last Day is attained by your first believing in God, and then believing in what God tells you. So you should not consider the two to be the same, but rather, belief in God is primary, and after this comes belief in all that God tells us; and God has told us that there will be a Last Day, and so we believe what He has told us. Then comes the matter of belief in the angels, as the True Lord *the Most High* mentions ‘the angels.’ How can we believe in a creature of God’s which we have never seen?

As long as we believe in the principle matter, which is belief in God, we believe in what God has informed us that there are angels. Even if the existence of angels is a matter of the unseen, we believe in them because God has told us about them. Likewise, we believe in the jinn even though we have not seen them; and we have been informed of all the other matters of the unseen by One in Whom we believe, and so we believe in it all.

All the matters of faith are unseen matters; you do not say that you ‘believe in’ a tangible thing, but rather, you only believe in unseen things because they

are things which cannot be perceived by the physical senses, and you make these things into doctrines, which mean things that are firm and never change. And as they are unseen matters, they might escape us, while if they were perceptible things, no one would ever be unaware of them because their perception of them would make them remember them. So faith is a matter of the unseen, and it is called 'doctrine' (*'aqida*) because it is something firmly tied (*ma'qud*) which can never be unravelled.

The pinnacle of all doctrine is to believe in God, and then to believe in all the unseen matter of which God informs you, and for which you have no evidence except the fact that God has informed you. If you see things connected with faith which are tangible matters, you should know that the path of faith has forked; for the angels and the Last Day have been mentioned, and they are both unseen matters, and after them come revelation (the Book) and prophets, both of which are tangible matters.

It is true that the Book is a tangible matter, as are the prophets; but we cannot sense that God has sent down revelation, or that He has sent forth the prophets. We were not alive when the revelation was sent down, nor when the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent, and our faith is based on our belief that God sent revelation down to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, and that this revelation came in the form of the Book, and that God chose Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to deliver this revelation; and all of these things are unseen, and intangible to us. Unseen matters are the basis of belief, or the foundation of faith.

After this, the verse moves on from speaking about matters of belief, to show us that righteousness is composed of matters of belief which are the basis for actions, and that actions are the essence of all religious devotion. The True Lord *the Most High* is not concerned whether one believes in Him, or believes in His angels, or His revelations, or His prophets; what God wants is that life on earth be governed by His teachings. And so the discourse turns to material matters, and God *the Most High* says, '...and gives away money, in spite of love for it...' indicating that a person possesses wealth and then spends (*ata*, with a long first vowel) it, meaning that he gives it; it is a different verb from the word (*ata*, with a short first vowel) which means 'to come.'

What is ‘money’ (*mal*)? Money means everything which can be amassed, although in Arabic we often use the word (*mal*) to mean the thing by which all substances can be attained: money. Money has become the means by which things are almost always obtained because we buy everything with money; but the real meaning of (*mal*) is everything that can be owned. How does substance come to me, to you, or to anyone else? Has anyone ever come out of his mother’s womb possessing anything? No. All that a person owns comes either from the work done by other people before him, whether from his father, or his grandfather, or it comes from his own work. So, we cannot say that he ‘gives away money’ unless he has either done some work of his own which has caused him to earn wealth, or he has inherited from someone else who had earned it. A person who earns devotes his life to work either to earn for himself, or if he makes more, then for his children too, or if he makes even more, then for his grandchildren as well.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...and gives away money, in spite of love for it....’ The word ‘love’ (*hubb*) is a gerund, and gerunds sometimes refer to their active agents and sometimes to their passive recipients. Take the word ‘punch’ for example: we say ‘Zaid punched ‘Umar;’ it is clear here that the ‘puncher’ is Zaid while the ‘punched’ is ‘Umar. But if we say, ‘I liked Zaid’s punching;’ the meaning is vague; if we add ‘of ‘Umar’, it is clear who punched and who was punched, but if we only say ‘I liked Zaid’s punching,’ it could bear two different possible meanings: either Zaid was the one who punched, or he was the one who was punched. So when a gerund is ascribed to something, it could be ascribed either to the active agent (the ‘doer’) or the passive recipient of the action.

God’s words ‘...and gives away money, in spite of love for it....’ (*wa ata al-mala ‘ala hubbih*) may be understood in more than one way. This may mean that man gives up his wealth although he cherishes it, or that he gives his wealth because he loves to give away from what he cherishes in deference to God’s bidding that one would never attain true righteousness unless one spends out of what one cherishes (*Al-‘Imran*: 92). It could mean either thing. Or, we could move higher to another meaning and say that it means ‘and spends his money out of love for spending,’ that is, of giving; that is, he loves

to give, and finds comfort in giving. We could also go further and understand it in a way which incorporates all of these other meanings, which is to say that it means: 'And spends his money out of love for God Who bade him do so.' All of these meanings are possible. The True Lord *the Most High* praises those who give food – however great their own want of it may be – to the needy, to the orphan and to the captive (*al-Insan*: 8).

All of these verses clarify for us the difference between owning and cherishing what you own. There might be a lot of things in your possession, but you do not cherish everything that you own. When you give your possessions away, you might give something away which you owned, but did not cherish, and so all you have done is to release it from your possession. But if you cherish the thing which you give to another, you thereby release it from your possession and from your love for it.

Otherwise, the possession in your hand is only a tool which you or anyone else could use, and which has no place in your heart. In context, a poet said:

I do not care for hoarding my wealth up for [difficult] times,
 Rather, I spend it in times of ease and hardship;
 If it is in my hand, and not in my heart,
 It belongs to me, not I to it.

The words of the True Lord *the Most High* '...and gives away money, in spite of love for it...' show us that either it can be given from one's possession, or it can be given from one's heart. The True Lord *the Most High* criticises those who want to do acts of obedience to God *the Exalted*, but only offer those things which they themselves dislike, and He says that such people ascribe to God something that they themselves dislike (*an-Nahl*: 62).

But to whom should this money be given? It is to be given to 'relatives....' Have you ever seen someone who has enough means to support himself, but his relatives who cannot work for themselves are needy? What kind of psychological condition does such a person have? He must have a wretched condition; for a believing person should make all people his kinsmen. In this regard, we might mention the story of Mu'awiya *God be pleased with him* when

he was the ruler of the Muslims, and his guard came to him and said, 'Commander of the Faithful, a man is at the door claiming to be your brother.' Mu'awiya *God be pleased with him* exclaimed, 'Do you not even recognise my own brothers? Let him in!' When the man came in, Mu'awiya *God be pleased with him* asked him, 'Which brother of mine are you?' He said, 'I am your brother from our father Adam *peace be upon him*.' What did Mu'awiya say? He said, 'A broken tie of kinship! By God, I shall be the first to reconnect it!' And he welcomed him.

If a person cannot keep his tie of kinship to all humanity, can he not at least keep it with his closest kinsfolk? How, then, could the believer enjoy the blessings of life while his near of kin are needy? Even if we forget about religion and humanity for the moment, should a person not share the good he has with his family?

In the sphere of faith, when God divides life into mutually complementary spheres, He *the Exalted* wants goodness to be distributed throughout the society. When He *the Exalted* wanted our species to continue, He decreed that the union of a man and woman be accompanied by a public contract and witnesses. Why? It is due to the fact that the fruit of marriage is the children which will bring a new generation of humanity into existence; and this new generation must be ascribed to their fathers in eye of the public; and if the father does not look after his children as God demands he should, people will censure him for it because they are his children.

And so when we see a person keep his marriage secret, for example by conducting an 'unofficial marriage' not disclosed to the authorities, we say to him: You only want to disown the fruits that will come from you so that your children are not ascribed to you. So we must be certain that every abandoned child on earth is the result of a mistake which is either public, or else which cannot be made public by a man who cannot bear the responsibility for the relationship he had with the woman. No man would reject a child of his unless he doubted it was his child, and this is what makes him deny its parentage.

The purification which God *the Most High* wanted to make for the relationship between men and women was willed by Him because He allows for the building of new generations from which the society of the future will be

formed; and before these children come along, they must have a firm basis to carry them. And so God gave us children and grandchildren, and He advised children to be good to their parents before this, and then the circle widens to include the immediate family.

Take a person and make a circle like this for him, and take another and make the same circle, and then take a third and make it again, and then make a census of all fit and able people, and define their family circles. You will find that every person in the world will enter into one of these circles; and so if you see any deviation from this, know that the centre of the circle has abandoned those within its circumference.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...and gives away money, in spite of love for it, to relatives....’ Reflect, then, on this exhortation to righteousness: the first thing mentioned about it is to spend on one’s near kin because they have a special place. If we all spent upon our near kin and gave to them from our excess wealth and the excess fruits of our labour, there would be no needy people; or, if there were any needy people, they would be few in number, and the obligatory poor-due would be enough to suffice them.

Or, as one scholar said, the term ‘relatives’ here refers to the kinsfolk of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*. They say this because God commands His Messenger to proclaim to the believers that He does not ask of them any recompense for his efforts except having loving kindness towards his kin (*ash-Shura*: 23).

Why the kinsfolk of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*?

It is because they have no share of the poor-due so that the one who delivered God’s message could be free of deriving any material benefit from this for himself or his family; and so God denied them any right to the poor-due. It is as though God wanted to say to us: You should not bar those whom God has raised above having recourse to the poor-due to which paupers have recourse – you should not bar them from having recourse to anything, but rather, you should consider them as your own near kin so that you do not force them into poverty.

And even if we take the verse to be referring to our own families, we can still say that the Prophet has a higher claim on us, as believers, than we have

on our own selves (*al-Ahzab*: 6), and so his family and household should be dearer to us than our own kinsfolk and families.

After this, God *the Most High* mentions ‘orphans.’ We know that an orphan is someone who loses his father before he grows into a man. Human orphans are not like animal orphans: an orphaned animal is one which has lost its mother, but an orphaned human is one who has lost his father. An orphan does not have a guardian unless he has inherited some money, in which case a guardian is charged with looking after his affairs. And so the True Lord *the Most High* commanded us to give from our wealth – however much we may love it – to the orphans, and He did not say ‘to the guardians of orphans,’ for there might be an orphan who is alone, for whom no one comes forward to be his guardian, and who may have no possessions that would necessitate his having a guardian; and so we have to give the orphan some of the money which God specifies as being part of righteousness, or else we give it to the guardian of the orphan so that he can spend it on him, if he does have a guardian.

Also, we have to give to the needy; the word *miskin* (‘needy’) is derived from the word *sukun* which means ‘stillness’; this is because a needy person is one who is unable to work, as though his lowliness and degradation in life have made him unable to move.

Scholars differ as to who is poor (*faqir*) and who is needy (*miskin*). Some of them say that the *faqir* is the one who does not possess anything, while the *miskin* owns less than he needs, that is, he does own something, but it is not enough to suffice him. Others say that the *faqir* is the one who owns less than he needs, while the *miskin* owns nothing.

In any case, God’s wisdom has willed that the poor be given part of what entails righteousness, and the needy another part. The difference of opinion amongst the scholars does not deny a share to either one of them because both the poor and the needy have a right to God’s wealth; and hence the difference is inconsequential.

Likewise we should give to the traveller (*ibn as-sabil*), literally ‘the son of the road.’ *Sabil* means the road, and the traveller is the one who is on the road. Usually a person is named after the place where he lives or where he is from; this is why when a person is called ‘the son of the road,’ this means that he has

no place to call his home except the road, and that he is a stranded man. In his home, the traveller might be rich, but the road has cut him off from his wealth and his possessions. Or he might have been rich, but his money had been stolen, and so he is stranded.

Why has God allotted a portion of righteous giving to the traveller? God has allotted a portion of this wealth to the wayfarer so that the believer understands that the mutual solidarity of faith centres on the environment in which he finds himself; if he is in one place and then moves on to another, he will still be in an environment of mutual solidarity based on faith.

We also give from our money to beggars, that is, to those who put themselves in a position where they beg; give to those who ask of you, even if they are riding on the back of a horse because you do not know why he is begging. Some people like to justify their stinginess by saying, 'Lots of beggars are nothing but professional beggars!' We say to them: As long as they are begging, that is the end of the matter. Our basis for saying this is the injunction of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Give to the beggar, even if he comes mounted on the back of a horse.'⁽¹⁾ As long as he has subjected himself to begging, then give him without hesitating.

You might think that he is carrying a bag filled with bread, or that he has hidden all his money far away. I say that he might well have bread, but not enough for his children, and he might well hide his money, but yet, it does not suffice him. You will not lose anything by giving to him, and to be wrong about giving is better than to be right about withholding.

We also give money 'for freeing slaves', i. e. to those who are in bondage (*riqab*). The root word *raqba* means the base of the neck, not the neck itself. The word *raqba* is also used metonymically to mean a whole being that is, representing the whole person. Why? This is because you can take control of a person's life from his neck: you can grasp him by his neck and control him, or put pressure on him so that he cannot breathe and so dies; so, sometimes the word *raqba* refers to the person himself. An example of this is found in the

(1) Narrated by Ibn 'Udayy in *Al-Kamel* on the authority of Abu Hurayra God be pleased with him with a weak chain of narrators.

Quran when God *the Most High* tells us that one of the things we can do to break through the hard pass is ‘untying a neck,’ that is freeing a slave or ransoming a captive (*al-Balad*: 12-13).

Thus ‘...for freeing slaves...’ means release a slave from bondage. A righteous person might buy a slave and then set him free, or share in freeing them, which is one way of abolition of slavery. There are also two other ways for abolition of slavery which are called *tadbir* and *mukataba*.

Suppose you have a slave who serves you faithfully and because of his long-serving faithfulness you decide to set him free after you die (*tadbir*), that is, you give him his freedom upon the event of your death so that his bondage is conditional on your continued life. Once your life is over, he becomes free, and so he is not considered your property and so is not inherited by anyone else.

Or you might agree to a contract (*mukataba*) with him for a fixed sum of money, so, for example you say that you will free him for one hundred pounds, and you give him permission to go and work and earn this money, and once he gives you one hundred pounds, you set him free. In such an instance, the people of righteousness would help this slave by contributing towards his *mukataba* contract to purchase his freedom.

Another aspect of righteousness is to be constant in prayer, so, the meaning becomes: but true righteousness is in he who believes in God, and the Last Day, and is constant in prayer. We know that the meaning of constancy in prayer is to offer the prayer at its proper times in its proper form.

An aspect of righteousness is also that we pay *zakat* or poor-due, and this indicates that the previously mentioned words ‘...and gives away money, in spite of love for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveller, the beggars, and for freeing slaves...’ do not refer to the poor-due, but rather, they are all additional acts of righteousness aside from prescribed *zakat*; for if *zakat* was included in what went before, God would not have mentioned it again in the same verse.

So, these are the forms of righteousness that the verse mentions, namely spending upon one’s relatives, orphans, the needy, the stranded traveller, beggars, and for the freeing of slaves from bondage; establishing prayer, and paying the prescribed *zakat*. All of this is for those who wish to reach the station of spiritual

excellence (*ihsan*) which as we know is to commit yourself to things which God has not obliged you to do, but rather, you do so in order to feel that God is pleased and contented with you; and so God accepts it from you.

And when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked if there were any duties related to wealth except the poor-due, he mentioned this verse: Righteousness is not that you turn your faces towards the east or the west, but [true] righteousness is [in] one who believes in God, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets, and gives away money, in spite of love for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveller, the beggars, and for freeing slaves; [in who] establishes prayer and gives *zakat* (prescribed alms); [in those who] fulfill their promise when they promise; and [in those who] are patient in poverty and hardship and in time of danger. Those are the ones who have been true, and it is those who are the pious (*al-Baqara*: 177).

So these are the requisite acts of righteousness, and the *zakat* is also required. The distribution of the *zakat* does not include the relatives, or the orphans. It is true that the *zakat* does give an allowance to the needy and the stranded traveller, but righteousness includes things which are not included in *zakat*. It is as though if you want to open the door for yourself to be truly righteous before God, you have to widen the sphere of your giving. You will find that righteousness involves a great deal of giving because the one who gives is acting as God's vicegerent. God is the One Who called mankind into existence; and since He called them into existence, He *the Exalted* made Himself responsible for providing their sustenance. When you spend upon the needy person whom God *the Most High* called into existence, you show your love for God by helping the needy people of His creation without God having commanded you to do so, and this is why we see that God *the Most High* puts forth to people the proposition: Who will lend to God a goodly loan? God will repay it to him with manifold increase (*al-Baqara*: 245).

If God *the Most High* is the One Who gives all wealth, how can He say, 'Offer Me a loan'? Indeed, this is so because He would not ask for a return of the gift of wealth He gave you; the wealth you possess is a gift from God, but if your fellow man is in need of it, He does not say to you, 'Give him from what you have, or lend him what you have;' rather, He says to you, 'Lend it to Me;

for I am the One Who made him, and His sustenance is required from Me.’ So, when you give, it is as though you are giving a loan to God. This is the meaning of His words ‘Who will lend to God a goodly loan?’ (*al-Baqara*: 245). He *the Exalted* grants you His blessings, and then asks that you loan them to Him.

Let us give an example of this drawn from worldly matters – and God *the Most High* is beyond all comparison and example – suppose that you are in need and have money troubles, and your children have lots of money saved up from what you used to give to them. And so you say to them, ‘Loan me some of the money you have, and I will give it back to you once my troubles are over.’ You do not want to ask for a return of your gift to them and the money you gave them, so, you ask for a loan from them. This is like what God *the Most High* does.

We can also learn from the example of our Lady Fatima Az-Zahra' *God be pleased with her* when her father, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* visited her and found her with a rusty coin in her hand which she was polishing. Her father asked her, ‘What are you doing, o Fatima?’ She replied, ‘I am polishing a coin.’ ‘Why?’ he asked. She replied, ‘Because I want to give it in charity.’ He said, ‘If you are going to give it in charity, then why are you polishing it?’ she replied, ‘Because I know that it will fall into God’s hand before it lands in the hand of the poor person.’

It is also part of righteousness that a person keeps his promises. The True Lord *the Most High* mentions those who ‘...fulfill their promise when they promise....’ What is a promise? There are promises (*‘ahd*), and there are contracts (*‘aqd*). A promise is conducted between two parties who agree on something, but it might be that only one of them gives, while the other does not give back; as for a contract, it is also between two parties, but in this case, both of them give something and take something.

It is also part of righteousness that you be one of those who are ‘...patient in poverty and hardship and in time of danger....’ We notice here that the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...fulfill their promise when they promise...’ using the nominative case in Arabic, because it is linked to the predicate of the nominal phrase ‘but true righteousness is...’ while we find the word ‘patient’ in the

accusative case in Arabic; why is this so? What does this change of case signify? The Arabic ear is used to speech which is sound and eloquent, and so if speech like this comes from an eloquent source, we say that he must have used the unusual grammatical case here in order to alert us to something which must be well understood; for the One speaking here is eloquent, and since He is eloquent, but nevertheless has said '*al-mawfun*' ('those who keep their promises') in the nominative case, and then said '*as-sabirin*' ('those who are patient') in the accusative case right after it – which apparently is a grammatical error, there must be a reason for this. But what is the reason?

The way to attain all the good things that have just been mentioned is patience: spending one's money, despite loving it, on relatives, and so on and so forth; this is why God wanted to give special attention to the quality of patience, and so He changed its grammatical case. This change of case requires that we substitute an appropriate verb, and so it is as though the implied meaning of 'and are patient' is 'I single out those who are patient,' and 'I especially praise those who are patient.' This way, the accusative case would be in place.

So, the purpose of the change of grammatical case here is to alert the ear to something new which merits this change of case. This is because patience is the key to all these other actions, and the one who can patiently observe the prayer, and give the *zakat*, and give money despite cherishing it, has truly succeeded and triumphed; and all of this is a test of patience. For this reason, God singled out those who are patient by using a different grammatical case so that we would understand they are the subject of praise, or of special emphasis.

And why did God single out the patient for His praise? It is because all religious responsibilities can be hard for the soul, and no one can bear these hardships unless he is able to be patient. If he can be patient, then all of this will be easy for him, and this is why God singled out patience for this special emphasis.

What is important is that the verse mentions 'those who are patient' after those 'who keep their promises' so that the change in case would be noticeable

and unambiguous; since the grammatical case of all that comes before ‘and are patient’ is that it is all added to the predicate of ‘...but [true] righteousness is [in] one who believes in God...’ This is why ‘...those who keep their promises...’ is in the nominative case so that we can see it is added to the predicate of ‘but true righteousness...’ and then after this comes ‘and are patient’ in the accusative case so that we would clearly see the difference between the two concepts. Had it been in the nominative case just like what came before it, this might have passed us by without paying much attention to it.

In the phrase ‘...and [those who] are patient in poverty and hardship...’ *ba’sa*’ means misery and poverty, and it is related to a person’s state: We say that So-and-so is in a miserable state. Hardship (*darra*’) means pain, hunger, and sickness, and the afflictions of the body. ‘And in time of danger.’ Danger (*ba’s*) here means times of war when the warrior meets his enemy in combat, and must have the patience and fortitude to fight.

So the attribute of patience is here linked to three things: in times of misery/poverty, illness and war against the enemy; with patience in all these three things. This is why the Noble Hadith says, ‘No calamity afflicts a believer save but God expiates (his sins) for him by it, even the thorn which pricks him.’⁽¹⁾

The True Lord *the Most High* says of those who attain to true righteousness that they are ‘...the ones who have been true....’ So, the ‘...one who believes in God, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets, and gives away money, in spite of love for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveller, the beggars, and for freeing slaves; [and who] establishes prayer and gives *zakat* (prescribed alms); [those who] fulfill their promise when they promise; and [those who] are patient in poverty and hardship and in time of danger. Those are the ones who have been true....’ What does it mean that they have been true? Truthfulness means that speech reflects reality; and so they were truthful in their proclamation of their faith and the reality of their life’s actions; and they were truthful when they said, ‘There is no god but God, and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of God.’

(1) Narrated by *Al-Bukhari* in *Kitab Al-Marda*.

So, the truthfulness of your faith depends on whether your life's actions are in line with the dictates of your faith. If you believe, and declare your surrender to God, but your life's actions contradict this declaration, we say: You have not proved yourself true; but if the attributes of faith are found in a person, we say to him: You have proved your faith true because your life's actions are in harmony with your faith. How many people there are who are all talk and no action, and who ascribe themselves to Islam with nothing but words.

What is the fruit of true faith? The True Lord *the Most High* answers us by saying of them that they are the 'ones who are the pious.' When you hear the word 'pious,' or 'fear God,' this means to place a barrier of protection between oneself and something. It is not required that you place a barrier between yourself and something unless you would not be able to bear this thing.

An example of this is God's injunction to the believers that they protect themselves and those who are close to them from the fire (*at-Tahrim*: 6). That is, place a barrier between yourself and the fire. We said that it is curious that the word 'fear/shield yourself against' can be used in such different ways as 'fear the fire', and then 'fear God.' How can there be fear of two such contradictory things? Indeed it can, because the meaning of 'fear the Fire' is 'place a barrier between yourselves and the fire.' Does the fire have any intrinsic power, or does God set it upon the sinner? It acts by virtue of the fact that God has set it upon the sinner. And so 'fear God' means 'shield yourself against God's wrath and the manifestations of His attributes of Majesty;' this is because God has attributes of Majesty and attributes of Beauty, and so you should place a barrier between yourselves and God's attributes of Majesty because you could not possibly bear God's wrath, nor God's overwhelming power, nor God's reprimand. So place a barrier between yourselves and His attributes of Majesty, one manifestation of which is the fire of Hell. So there is a correspondence here, not a contradiction.

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقِصَاصُ فِي الْقَتْلِ ۖ الْحُرُّ بِالْحُرِّ وَالْعَبْدُ بِالْعَبْدِ
وَالْأُنثَىٰ بِالْأُنثَىٰ ۖ فَمَنْ عُفِيَ لَهُ مِنْ أَخِيهِ شَيْءٌ فَأَبْيَعُ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ ۖ وَادِّاءُ إِلَيْهِ بِإِحْسَنٍ ۗ
ذَٰلِكَ تَخْفِيفٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ ۖ فَمَنِ اعْتَدَىٰ بَعْدَ ذَٰلِكَ فَلَهُ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿١٧٨﴾

You who believe, fair retribution is prescribed for you in cases of murder: the free man for the free man, the slave for the slave, the female for the female. But if the culprit is pardoned by his aggrieved brother, this shall be adhered to fairly, and the culprit shall pay what is due in a good way. This is an alleviation from your Lord and an act of mercy. If anyone then exceeds these limits, grievous suffering awaits him [178] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 178)

When God *the Most High* calls ‘O you who have believed...’ this call is a prologue to the decree which will then follow. The implication of these words is, ‘I do not command you against your will, or your choice, but rather I command you because you have chosen to believe in Me; and as long as you believe in Me, pay heed to My commands.’ God *the Most High* does not command those who do not believe in Him, and since God only commands those who believe in Him, your faith in Him has made you a partner in the contract; so, if He prescribes something for you, you are party to this deal because if you did not believe, it would not have been prescribed. So it is as though the deal has already been struck, and as long as it has already been struck, you share in the responsibility. And God *the Most High* says ‘*kutiba*’ (‘prescribed in the passive voice), and not ‘*kataba*’ (‘has prescribed’) in the active. You can notice that this difference shows up wherever man has a share in the matter. On the other hand, when the matter is concerned with God’s Will alone, He *the Exalted* uses the active voice, like when God says that He *kataba* (‘has ordained’) that He shall most certainly prevail, He and His Messengers (*al-Mujadala*: 21). He is the One Who has ordained this, and He has no partner.

When you read *kutiba ‘alaikum* (‘prescribed upon you’), you should understand that this implies there will be a need for effort and endeavour; this is contrary to *kataba lakum* (‘ordained/willed for you’), as is the case when

God *the Most High* teaches the believers to say that nothing can befall them save what God has decreed for them (*at-Tawba*: 51).

The words 'Prescribed for us' make us feel that this thing is in our interest. On the face of the matter, it seems that just retribution is something ordained as a burden upon you. If retribution is prescribed upon you and you are a murderer, as for the family of the victim, it has been prescribed for them. So every 'upon' has a 'for' as its counterbalance. You could either be a murderer or a victim; if you are a victim, then God has prescribed it for you, and if you are a murderer, then God has prescribed it upon you. This is because if something is 'for' me, it must be 'upon' or 'against' someone else; and if something is 'against' me, it must be 'for' someone else. Laws are not made for one person, but are made for all people.

When He *the Exalted* says, '...prescribed upon you is legal retribution...' and then in the next verse says that in the law of just retribution there is life for those who have reason (*al-Baqara*: 179), He says both 'for' and 'upon'; 'upon you' refers to the murderer,' and 'for you' to the victim. The law is just because it does not benefit one at the expense of another; and contracts always look after the interest of both parties.

'O you who have believed, prescribed for you is legal retribution for those murdered - the free for the free....' Who is free? A free man (*hurr*) is the opposite of a slave, someone who is not owned as bondsmen by someone else. The Arabic word (*hurr*) also means the noblest part of anything: when applied to money, it means the money one has at one's disposal which is the noblest form of money; when applied to human beings, it means those who are not owned by anyone; when applied to plants, it means those which are eaten raw, i.e. uncooked, like pistachios and almonds.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...the free for the free....' The outward, apparent meaning of this is that a free person should not be executed for murdering a slave because He says, '...the free for the free, the slave for the slave, and the female for the female....' But what if a slave murders a freeman or a woman murders a man, should we execute them, or not?

The True Lord *the Most High* decides the rules of retribution, and He *the Exalted* did not decree that a freeman should only be executed for murdering a freeman;

rather, the meaning of the verse is that a freeman should be executed for killing a freeman, and a slave should be executed if he kills a slave, and a woman should be executed for killing a woman. This is absolute justice since the punishment of the murderer is commensurate with his crime, and does not necessitate that any more than this be done to expiate the murder. By this law, the True Lord *the Most High* was addressing a practice which was prevalent amongst the tribes at the time, when they used to kill for revenge and retaliation.

In the ignorant pre-Islamic times, if fighting broke out between two tribes naturally, people would die and fall victim to this fighting. If a slave were killed from one tribe, the tribe which owned him would try to go one step further in their retaliation for him by taking a freeman in revenge for him. Likewise, if a woman were killed in the war, her tribe would go one step further in their retaliation by taking a man.

The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to eliminate this cycle of revenge gradually, and so He issued this injunction: ‘...the free for the free, the slave for the slave, and the female for the female....’ Here, the True Lord *the Most High* is addressing the matter of the escalation of revenge-killings, and giving a decree which eliminates this disproportionate revenge.

In Upper Egypt, we still suffer the results of those who, out of heedlessness, do not implement the Law of God. When a man is killed, his people do not seek out the murderer for retaliation, but rather, they go and kill the highest member of his household in revenge. The ones seeking revenge want to do as much harm as they can, and they might make the price of the murder victim be ten men from the other family, and they might mutilate their bodies as part of their revenge. None of this has anything to do with just retribution. In the times of ignorance, they would be excessive when taking vengeance, and so the True Lord *the Most High* tells all humanity that this excessive vengeance will cause the fires of enmity to rage forever. And so the True Lord *the Exalted* here returns the matter of retaliation to its lowest level so that if one tribe kills a slave, the other tribe cannot escalate matters by killing a freeman in retaliation for this slave.

Thus the True Lord *the Most High* here was legislating about a matter which concerned these old civil conflicts and the mass killing that would

occur because of them, and the excessive acts of vengeance which would take place as a result. This is an example of gradual legislation, and God *the Most High* decreed that the matter of retaliation be reduced to its lowest level so that if one tribe killed a slave, the other tribe could not escalate matters by killing a freeman. And after this, the True Lord *the Most High* decreed that in normal circumstances, the murderer should be subjected to just retribution either by being executed or by paying an indemnity; and therefore, another verse was revealed in which the True Lord *the Most High* said that in the Torah, He prescribed for the Jews: life for life, and eye for eye, and nose for nose, and ear for ear, and tooth for tooth, and for wounds retaliation; but he who shall forgo it out of charity will atone thereby for some of his past sins. And they who do not judge in accordance with what God has revealed, they are the transgressors (*al-Ma'ida*: 45).

So, just retribution in cases of murder is a life for a life, and there is no distinction made between slaves or freemen or women, but rather, it is simply a life for a life. The True Lord *the Most High*, by this legislation of just retribution, wants to bring an end to cycles of revenge and hatred. When you hear the words 'just retribution' and 'killing,' this means that the soul is filled with hatred and loathing, and God wants to cleanse all malice and hateful desire for vengeance from the souls of the believers. The True Lord *the Most High* gives the near of kin the right whether to demand execution or to forgive; and when God gives the near of kin the right to demand execution, the life of the murderer is in the hands of the victim's kinsman; if the kinsman forgives, it will not be because he is forced to by law, but rather will be out of the largesse of his soul. In this way, the True Lord *the Most High* drains away all anger and rage.

After this, God *the Most High* wants to soften the heart of the kinsman by saying, '...But whoever overlooks from his brother anything, then there should be a suitable follow-up and payment to him with good conduct....'

If we reflect on God's words '...But whoever overlooks from his brother anything, then there should be a suitable follow-up and payment to him with good conduct...', we notice that there is a switch from wrathful vengeance to forgiveness, and then, highly-stressed compassion, as though He were saying, 'Do not forget the brotherhood of faith.' '...But whoever overlooks from his

brother anything, then there should be a suitable follow-up and payment to him with good conduct....'

When the True Lord *the Most High* says 'brother', consider whether this refers to a brother who shares the same father, such as was the case when God *the Most High* said 'Joseph's brothers came,' (*Yusuf*: 58), or is it one of the cases when God raises the connection of faith to the level of brotherhood, saying that all believers are but brethren (*al-Hujurat*: 10), that is, be careful not to maintain your material ties of kin without maintaining your spiritual ties of faith.

The basic meaning of 'brothers' *ikhwa* are those who share a father, as is the case in 'Joseph's brothers came.' If they are brethren in the sense of comrades, but have different fathers, they are termed *ikhwan*; and if they ascend to the connection of faith, they are called *ikhwa*. When God called them *ikhwan*, He *the Exalted* reminded the believers of the blessings which He has bestowed upon them: how, when they were enemies, He brought their hearts together so that through His blessing they became brethren (*Al-Imran*: 103). They had been divided by war, hatred, and discord, and so He did not call them *ikhwa* because they were still somewhat at odds, but rather, He called them *ikhwan*; and once faith had taken root in their souls, He called them *ikhwa*.

Let us consider events in the battle of Badr. Mus'ab ibn 'Umair *God be pleased with him*, who, before his conversion to Islam, had been the spoiled and pampered boy of Quraysh, always smelling of fine perfume and wearing silk; had had everything changed after he embraced Islam, for his faith took him away from this finery and made him share in the hardships of the early believers to the extent that he was reduced to wearing animal skins, and when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* saw him in this state he said, 'Look what faith has done to your friend.'

When the battle of Badr came, he encountered his brother, Abu 'Aziz, who had kept to the religion of Quraysh. The two of them met in battle, Mus'ab *God be pleased with him* on the side of the believers and Abu 'Aziz on the side of the idolaters. During the battle, Mus'ab *God be pleased with him* saw that his brother Abu 'Aziz had been taken captive by Abu Al-Yusr *God be pleased with him*, who was one of the Medinan Helpers, and so Mus'ab *God be pleased with him* looked to Abu Al-Yusr *God be pleased with him* and said, 'O

Abu al-Yusr! Bind your prisoner well, for his mother is wealthy and will pay for him a hefty ransom!’

Abu ‘Aziz looked at him and said, ‘Brother, is this how you commend me to others?’ Mus‘ab *God be pleased with him* replied, ‘No, you are not my brother, but rather, he is!’, and he pointed at Abu Al-Yusr *God be pleased with him*. The connection of blood was finished, and the connection of faith had become primary, and Mus‘ab and Abu Al-Yusr *God be pleased with them* had become brothers in faith, and his connection with his flesh-and-blood brother had ended because he was still an idolater.

So, it is as though God’s words ‘...But whoever overlooks from his brother anything...’ are meant as an encouragement for the kinsman to forgive, and not to forget the brotherhood of faith. True, he is the kinsman of the murder victim, because he is connected to him in flesh and blood; but God *the Most High* wants to make the brotherhood of faith ascendant over the brotherhood of blood: ‘...But whoever overlooks from his brother anything, then there should be a suitable follow-up and payment to him with good conduct....’

The True Lord *the Most High* mentioned brotherhood here to soften emotions, to alert both, the families of the murderer and the victim, to the fact that murder does not mean that the brotherhood of faith is over. No. the believers should bear in mind that sometimes the bond of the brotherhood of faith can weaken; and when the kinsmen of the victim remember the brotherhood of faith, forgiveness will become easier for their souls to accept. We should notice that the True Lord *the Most High* always wants us to take the higher path, and so He reminds us that if the kinsmen have any mercy, then mercy should prevail in this matter so that the murderer is not executed.

After this, let us consider the precision of the ruling of the True Lord *the Most High* in how He cleanses anger from the hearts by making the blood indemnity stand in place of the just retribution of execution. The indemnity which the kinsmen take from the murderer might be postponed, or the murderer and his family might be able to pay it right away. And so the one who is responsible for the indemnity should pay it, and the family of the victim should accept it with fairness and good conduct, and the family of the murderer, or the murder himself, should give the restitution in a goodly manner.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...But whoever overlooks from his brother anything....’ The word ‘anything’ means that if one of the kinsmen of the victim forgives, then this is one single forgiveness and he does not have the right to seek retribution after this, and the matter is finished and the blood is spared. God did not want to put a text which completely prohibited just retribution, but rather, He wanted to give the kinsman the right to demand execution; and since he has the right to demand execution, the matter is in his hands: if he forgives, the life of the murderer will be considered as a fruit of his goodness; and if the murderer lives, this would not leave any hatred in the heart of the kinsman, but rather the murderer would seek his favour because he was good to him and gave him his life.

But if the text referring to the retribution for murder taken by the tribes had been the only text to remain, and God had not raised the matter of forgiveness, the rancour would have remained in the heart.

The cycles of revenge found in modern societies exist because we do not give the kinsman the right to decide the fate of the murderer. If the murderer was allowed to go to the family of the victim and see them in their house, and beg them for mercy, and take his burial shroud with him and say to them, ‘I have come to you so, you can take retribution from me, and here is my burial shroud, so, do as you will,’ it would never be the case that the kinsmen would exact revenge upon the killer, but rather, it would be the normal thing for them to forgive him. Why?

Because they would have him at their mercy, and his life would be in their hands, and the normal thing in such an occasion is that enmity turns into compassion. And so the killer owes his life to those who forgive him, and those of his children who know this see that their father’s life was a gift given to him by the family of the victim, and they will see that the mercy of the victim’s family is what saved the life of their relative. And so the circle widens, and the enmity turns into compassion.

God enjoins on the believers to repel evil with something that is better – and then you will find that the one with whom there was enmity has become a true friend (*Fussilat*: 34).

Had God *the Most High* not allowed just retribution, this would have caused chaos; and so He did allow it, and then subtly encouraged mercy by making the waiving of retribution a matter of largesse on the part of the victim's kinsman, and making us incline to it, saying, '...But whoever overlooks from his brother anything, then there should be a suitable follow-up and payment to him with good conduct....' Does it make sense to say that the indemnity be paid 'with good conduct'? Let us remember that the one speaking here is God, and His Word is the Quran, and the precision of the Quran is without limit. The True Lord *the Most High* here draws attention to the fact that if the family of the victim accept the indemnity, this means that they had the right to demand that retribution be exacted from the murderer, but they chose to give him the right to live; and this should be met with a response or an acknowledgement which is better than it: one good turn deserves another.

It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* does not want the kinsmen to put excessive pressure on the murderer or his family when they claim their right, just as He wants the killer or his family to give the indemnity in a way that properly acknowledges the mercy which has been shown to the killer. This is a lightening of the commandment of the Torah; for in the Torah there was no way for the killer to expiate his crime with an indemnity, but rather, the only retribution accepted by the Torah was 'a life for a life.' And in the Gospel, there was neither retribution nor indemnity, for there was a principle by which the followers of Jesus *peace be upon him* wanted to rise above the Jews who were entrenched in materialism. Jesus *peace be upon him* was sent as a messenger to the Israelites to cleanse their hearts of materialism, and so he brought them the principle of: 'If someone slaps you on your right cheek, offer him the left.'

But Islam came as a universal religion for all, and so it encouraged the soul to rise above, and at the same time gave people their rights, and so it preserved the right of just retribution and made a place for lenience also. The True Lord *the Most High* says about the indemnity, '...This is alleviation from your Lord and a mercy. But whoever transgresses after that will have a painful punishment.' What could this transgression be after the allowance for indemnity and mercy has been made?

The practice of some of the tribes was that if one of them was killed, they would claim to have forgiven and buried the hatchet, and take the indemnity so that the killer would feel safe to come out of hiding, whereupon they would kill him. The True Lord *the Most High* affirms here that such an action is transgression, and that anyone who transgresses after forgoing the right to demand execution and taking the indemnity, will be subjected to a painful punishment. We can infer from God's ruling of painful punishment here that the one who transgresses by killing he whom he had claimed to forgive cannot himself offer any indemnity for this, and should be executed for his action; and God does not absolve him from the suffering of this world, nor that of the Hereafter.

The True Lord *the Most High* excuses the murderer any punishment and suffering if he accepts the retribution he owes and submits to it, or if he is pardoned and gives the indemnity; but the True Lord *the Most High* does not accept anything but the use of the opportunities which He has given to humanity that they might elevate their relationships. The True Lord *the Most High* does not accept that the family of the victim should hide behind forgiveness simply in order that they can kill the murderer once they have publicly forgiven him; for to do this is to play around with the commandments God has issued to His servants. And so the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَلَكُمْ فِي الْقِصَاصِ حَيَوةٌ يَا أُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٧٩﴾

Fair retribution saves life for you, people of understanding, so that you may guard yourselves against what is wrong [179] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 179)

Notice here that the Quranic discourse at first said, 'O you who have believed, prescribed upon you is...' (*al-Baqara*: 178), and now it says, 'And in legal retribution there is life for you....' Precise, ordered legislation decrees responsibilities and rights, and there can be no responsibility without a corresponding right, and no right without a corresponding responsibility. In order to recognise the loftiness of this legislation, every believer should consider his responsibilities and compare them to his rights; in doing so, the believer will discover that in the light of God's Law he has attained absolute justice.

God is the Lawgiver, and He is the Lord of all mankind, and so no believer has more right to God than any other. Religious responsibility prohibits injustice, and upholds rights, and protects and preserves a person's property and dignity. People usually argue for their own rights and demand them in full, yet, they try to reduce their responsibilities; but the believer is the one who shoulders all of his responsibilities and so receives all of his rights as the True Lord *the Most High* says, 'And in legal retribution there is life for you, o you people of insight, that you may be God-fearing.'

Legal retribution is ordained for the killer, the victim, and the kinsman. If the killer knows that God has ordained just retribution, this makes it necessary for the killer to give himself up, and his family must not hide him far from the eyes of the people; for the murderer must bear responsibility for what he has done. When the killer finds himself surrounded by a believing society which does not accept murder, he will be deterred from killing. Legal retribution is a source of life because the one who intends to kill, might be deterred if he knows that someone will exact retribution on him, and that people will not agree to hide him.

After this, let us now consider those who prattle away, saying, 'Retribution is barbaric and inhumane.' We ask them: Why are you aggrieved to see a person being subjected to retribution rightfully after he had killed someone else wrongfully? Why do you grieve for him?

God *the Most High* did not legislate these punishments so that they would be carried out, but rather, He legislated them as a deterrent. When we carry out just retaliation on the murderer, we protect the rest of society from having amongst them a murderer who does not respect the lives of others, and at the same time we protect this criminal from himself because he will think one thousand times before he commits the crime.

So, taking retribution from a murderer is a warning to others and a means of protection for the rest of society; this is why the True Lord *the Most High* says, 'And in legal retribution there is life for you....' The True Lord *the Most High* wants to forewarn us against being swayed by false leniency, thoughtless 'humanity', and foolish emotion, into doing away with just retribution.

How can we be outraged when a murderer is rightfully punished, and be unmoved when an innocent person is murdered? When the True Lord *the Most High* legislates just retribution, it is as though He were saying: Beware of killing anyone because if you do, you too will be killed; and this is a means of protection for all people from being killed. The legislation of just retaliation is a means of life for you because when you know that if you kill an innocent person, you in turn will be killed for it, you will refrain from killing anyone, and so it will be as though you have saved your own life; and this is truly just and righteous legislation.

So, there is life in just retaliation because everyone is subject to retaliation, and everyone has the right to claim it. It is a legislation which addresses those endowed with intelligence and insight who recognise the essential purpose of rules and laws; as for those who do not possess insight, they are the ones who argue about things without understanding the essence of them. If there were no retaliation, no one would be deterred; if there were no retaliation, humanity would descend into barbarity. The wisdom behind legislating punishments is to prevent the crime from being committed, and in this way the crime can decline along with the punishment so that the right is equal to the responsibility.

Anyone who reflects on the matters of the universe will find that the balance in this world, for example, came in the past from two great powers who each feared the other, and who were distinct from each other, and this difference gave life to other peoples; for had they been agreed upon falsehood, the fundamentals of their nations would have been destroyed, and this would have destroyed the whole world, and made slaves out of all the other peoples.

And so every regime in the world bore hatred and malice towards the other regimes and wanted to make its own system dominant, but feared the power of the other regime; and this mutual fear protected the lives of the others, and provided the believers with an opportunity to utilise the means of scientific advancement so that they could present to the world a fine example of how life can be for those who follow God's guidance. Now that one of these powers, the Soviet Union, has crumbled, the United States has begun to search for another rival because it knows that if it were to live without another equal power to counter it, the smaller powers might be encouraged to challenge it.

Fear of punishment is what creates balance between the powers of the world; and fear of punishment is what creates balance where individuals are concerned, as well. The justice of the Dispenser of Mercy is what requires us to meet crimes with their appropriate punishments, and that others witness these punishments so that they will be deterred.

And so concerning the crime of fornication, for example, the True Lord *the Most High* emphasises the need for the punishment to be witnessed by a group of people so that they will be deterred. Very strict investigation is required in matters of fornication because if there is no careful investigation the people will be beset by worries, and doubts will be raised about parentage; and the punishment is also strict, as the True Lord *the Most High* ordains that the punishment for the adulteress and the adulterer is to flog each of them with a hundred stripes, and let not compassion with them keep you from carrying out this law of God, if you truly believe in God and the Last Day; and let a group of the believers witness their chastisement (*an-Nur*: 2).

The one who violates the rights of his fellow men also thereby violates the rights of God, and so true faith means to seek to please God, not please the people. To carry out a punishment on a transgressor is to obey God's Law, and to display this punishment to others is a way to spread the notion that transgressors will be punished; and so the True Lord *the Most High* legislated punishment and made it public so that the human soul would be balanced.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* deals with another social matter. After dealing with the matter of homicide, the True Lord *the Most High* then moves the discussion to another of life's concerns, the concern of natural death. It is as though, after clarifying for us the matter of death by criminal means, the True Lord *the Most High* wants to clarify for us some of the matters connected with natural death, which is not caused by any deliberate action. In the next verse, the True Lord *the Most High* deals with some of the things connected with death in order to establish economic equilibrium in society, just as the verse before it established penal equilibrium in society. The True Lord *the Most High* says:

كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ إِذَا حَضَرَ أَحَدَكُمُ الْمَوْتُ إِن تَرَكَ خَيْرًا الْوَصِيَّةُ
لِلْوَالِدَيْنِ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ حَقًّا عَلَى الْمُتَّقِينَ

**it is prescribed that he should make a proper bequest to
parents and close relatives a duty incumbent on those who
are mindful of God [180] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 180)**

As we explained before, the True Lord *the Most High* does not force people to do anything, but rather, He presents to them the case of faith in Him, and if they believe, their belief requires them to follow His teachings. Therefore, because of his faith, the believer also believes in everything that God ordains upon him. The believer is the one who accepts God as Deity and Lawgiver, and so when God ordains something upon the believer, the believer shares in the ordination of this thing by dint of the faith he professes. As for he, who disbelieves in the True Lord *the Most High*, God does not force him to give up his decision to disbelieve, but only ordains one thing for him: chastisement in the Hereafter.

God *the Most High* only issues commands to those who believe in Him, and love Him, and believe in all of His attributes of Majesty and Perfection. This is why religious responsibility is an honour by which God has ennobled those who love Him and believe in Him. If the disbelievers realise that God has ignored them because they do not believe in Him, they would be quick to accept faith, and they would see the nobility of every believer manifested in the responsibilities to which God holds him. The believer keeps to his responsibilities out of submission to God's will, and to submit to God's will means to love Him; as long as there is love between the servant and his Lord, the True Lord *the Most High* wants to make this love continue, and so the commands of God are a means of sustaining love between the servant and the Lord.

The servant loves the Lord by his faith, and the Lord loves the servant by His commands; and these commands are a higher level than the faith of the servant since God does not gain anything from the faith of the servant, but the servant does gain from the commands of God. The believer must be conscious of the honour of God's commands; to be commanded is not a shameful thing to which the True Lord *the Most High* subjects His believing servants, but it is rather, an honour which God wants for His believing servants. And so the

words of the True Lord *the Most High* 'it is prescribed upon you...' imply a matter in which the servant and the Lord share; this ordainment is something shared by the True Lord *the Most High* who reveals the command, and the servant who believes in the command.

The True Lord *the Most High* here issues a command related to bequests, saying, 'It is prescribed upon you, when any one of you is at the point of death, if he leaves wealth, that he should bequeath to his parents and kindred in accordance with what is acceptably fair; this is binding on those who fear God.'

We find here two conditions: the first condition begins with 'when,' which refers to a certain matter which will definitely occur. Death is an absolute certainty for everyone, and so the True Lord *the Most High* introduces this condition with the word 'when' (*idha*), which is a particle used to introduce a condition clause, and also an adverb of time. Death is certain, but no one knows exactly when it will occur.

The second condition begins with 'if' (Arabic '*in*') which is a particle to introduce a conditional clause we use when speaking of something which is not certain. A person might leave a fortune behind him when he dies, or he might leave nothing at all. And so the True Lord *the Most High* commands His servant to make bequests of his wealth. Why? Because the True Lord wants to make laws which preserve social well-being, and so the True Lord counsels His servants to work hard in life so that they can earn enough provisions to make them comfortable, and to meet their needs with some left over; and this excess is the meaning of 'wealth' and the exact definition of wealth differs from one person to another and from one time to another.

In the old days, when a person died and left ten pounds, this amount was considered to be valuable, while in these days if a person dies and leaves a thousand pounds some people might consider this to be a small amount. Wealth is valued according to its time, and so God did not specify any particular amount here. In Egypt, for example, we used to exchange a pound note for a gold pound coin and have two-and-a-half pence left over, while now the same amount of gold is worth more than two hundred and fifty pounds. This is because the value of the Egyptian pound in the past was high, while now,

hard currency far outnumbers gold reserves, and as a result, the golden pound has become much more valuable than the pound note.

Because the True Lord *the Most High* wants the best for people, He did not specify the amount of wealth or its value. Before a person dies while in possession of some wealth, he must make bequests of it. We can observe that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* forbade that one should wait until the moment of death to give his bequests, or to tell his family what debts he owes because at the time of death, a person may not be thinking about these kinds of things. And so we should understand that the True Lord *the Most High* is telling us that a person should keep a record of what he has and what he owes during his life, and stipulate and write down the bequests he wishes to leave upon his death; the believer should say, ‘When I die, my parents will receive such-and-such, and my relatives such-and-such.’

That is, the believer is commanded to write his bequests while he is still healthy, and not wait until he is dying to give his bequests. To whom does the True Lord *the Most High* say wealth should be given? He ‘...should bequeath to his parents and kindred in accordance with what is acceptably fair; this is binding on those who fear God.’ The True Lord *the Most High* knows that His servants are likely to consider their children and forget about their parents because people consider their parents as people who do not have long to live even though parents are the reason why children even have life at all. And so the True Lord *the Most High* counsels His servants to leave some of their wealth to their fathers and mothers, and also to their near of kin. He *the Exalted* wants to protect two potentially vulnerable groups of people: parents and relatives.

This ruling came before the laws of inheritance had been ordained. Before the laws of inheritance, people would leave everything they owned to their children, but God *the Most High* wanted them to cease the practice of giving everything to the children and leaving out parents and near of kin. After this, God specified the parents’ share of inheritance; as for the near of kin, the True Lord *the Most High* left it up to His servants to decide how much to leave them. The parents might be disbelievers, who therefore do not inherit from their child, but the True Lord *the Most High* says that He has enjoined upon man goodness towards his parents: his mother bore him by bearing weakness upon

weakness, and his utter dependence on her lasted two years: hence, he should be grateful towards God and towards his parents, and he should remember that to God all shall come. Man should revere his parents; yet should they endeavour to make him join a divinity with God, something which his mind cannot accept, he should not obey them; but even then, he should bear them company in this world's life with kindness, and follow the path of those who turn towards God. In the end, to God everyone must return; and thereupon, He will make people truly understand all that they were doing in life (*Luqman*: 14-15).

The True Lord *the Most High* here reminds His servants of the favours He gave them, and also the favours of their parents, but if the parents are idolaters, they must not be obeyed if they try to impose their idolatry on their offspring; yet still, there is the commandment to bear them kind company in this life and to follow the path of the believers who adhere to God's teachings. And so the believer is entitled to leave some of his wealth to his parents even if they are disbelievers, and we know that the upper limit of a bequest is a third of all a person owns, the rest being reserved for the legal process of estate division. As for if they are believers, we follow the Noble Prophetic Hadith: 'There can be no bequest for one who legally inherits.'⁽¹⁾

So bequests are for the weak relatives who do not stand to inherit; and this is the meaning of societal welfare. When the True Lord *the Most High* tells His servants to make bequests, while they still live, for their weak relatives, He wants to make them understand that they have a responsibility towards these people, and so it is good that a person works in life and earns a lawful livelihood so that he can make his heirs wealthy instead of leaving them a burden on someone else.

Sa'd ibn Abu Waqqas *God be pleased with him* relates that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* came to visit him during his illness in Mecca and said, 'May God have mercy on the son of 'Afra.' Sa'd asked, 'O Messenger of God, should I leave all my wealth as a bequest?' He said no, so, he asked, 'Or half of it?' He said no, so, he said, 'Then a third?' He said, 'A third, and a third is a lot: it is better that you should leave your heirs wealthy than that you should

(1) Narrated by *Al-Baihaqi* in his *Sunan* and by *Ad-Daraqutni* on the authority of *Jabir God be pleased with him*.

leave them in need, begging from people.’⁽¹⁾ If God *the Most High* gives you much wealth as a result of your work, you should be very careful not to confine all this wealth to those who stand to inherit from you. Why? Because if you confine everything to those who stand to inherit from you, you might come across someone in your life who is related to you, but who does not stand to inherit from you, and who needs help him to make ends meet; and if you do not help him, he will envy you and envy all the blessings God has given to you. But if this relative knows that he has the chance to obtain some of the favours that God has given you, although it will be by a bequest and not an automatic legal inheritance, this relative will be happy for you, for the favours God has given you.

And so the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘It is prescribed upon you, when any one of you is at the point of death, if he leaves wealth, that he should bequeath to his parents and kindred in accordance with what is acceptably fair; this is binding on those who fear God.’

The True Lord *the Most High* wants His servants to bear in mind their relatives who will not inherit from them automatically, after He made parents automatic beneficiaries. When a person is related to someone who dies leaving wealth, and who leaves him some of this wealth as a bequest, this relative will be taken by the same sentiment, and so will learn not to keep wealth from the needy; Love will then spread and bonds of regard will be formed.

The True Lord *the Most High* knows – and He well knows the souls of His servants – that the one who receives a bequest might not be honest, while the one who inherits might be honest, and so His legislation takes this into account; for when someone takes his bequest from the estate, this reduces the amount inherited by the heirs. The True Lord *the Most High* wants to protect all parties: the one who leaves a bequest, and the one who receives it, and the one who inherits, and in this regard He *the Exalted* says:

(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Ahmad, and An-Nasa’i.

فَمَنْ بَدَّلَهُ بَعْدَ مَا سَمِعَهُ فَإِنَّمَا إِثْمُهُ عَلَى الَّذِينَ يُبَدِّلُونَهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١٨١﴾

If anyone alters the bequest after hearing it, the guilt of the alteration will fall on them: God is all hearing and all knowing [181]

(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 181)

We know that at the time the Quran was revealed, bequests were made orally and were not generally written down. And so the True Lord *the Most High* deals here with the aspect which is equally shared by the one who bequeaths, the one who receives the bequest, and the legal heir, namely that of speech. Speech was the method used to arrange all this in the past, and there were none of these modern methods such as official will-readings; this is why altering the provision of a deceased person's bequest was a sin for the one who did it.

The one who bequeaths is clearly innocent, while the one who receives the bequest and the legal heir should be aware that God knows the secrets of the heart, and He is All-Hearing and All-Knowing. The True Lord *the Most High* wants there to be a good relationship between the one who receives a bequest and the legal heir, and so He *the Exalted* says:

فَمَنْ خَافَ مِنْ مَوْصٍ جَنَفًا أَوْ إِثْمًا فَأَصْلَحَ بَيْنَهُمْ فَلَا إِثْمَ عَلَيْهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿١٨٢﴾

But if anyone knows that the testator has made a mistake, or done wrong, and so puts things right between the parties, he will incur no sin: God is most forgiving and merciful [182]

(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 182)

The True Lord *the Most High* wants justice for all, and so if a bequest is unjust and deviating from the straight path, and a poor person has been neglected while a rich person has been made even richer, or the relatives have been excluded, this prevents the societal well-being which God desires. And so if someone tries to do the right thing by correcting the bequest, he does not sin by altering the bequest to make it sound and pleasing to God; for God is forgiving and merciful.

A person might fear that the testator has made a mistake, meaning an injustice or an imbalance. A person may be created with some kind of a physical imbalance, i.e. in such a way that one side of him is lower than the other. We know from

the scientists of anatomy that one half of the human body is different from the other half; this difference might be obvious in some cases, while in others it cannot be observed except by careful scrutiny.

A person might not have any choice about being imbalanced, but the sin comes when a person chooses, that is, when he knows it is a sin but does it anyway. And so if someone fears that a testator has made a mistake, i.e. an imbalanced decision, unintentionally, this is something that the testator had no choice about and fixing this error and this injustice is doing a favour for the testator. As for the case if the testator deliberately intended to do wrong, it is obligatory to right this wrong. This is the precision of Quranic legislation which trains all a person's faculties to accomplish complete justice.

The True Lord *the Most High* dealt with the matter of legal retribution by invoking all the faculties of good in mankind when He said, '...But whoever overlooks from his brother anything, then there should be a suitable follow-up and payment to him with good conduct....'

This is not a dry legislation like that of human beings, but rather, it is legislation from the Most-Merciful Creator Who knows all the secrets of mankind. The True Lord *the Most High* stirs up all the inclinations to good in the human soul, and in this same way He deals with the matter of alterations made to the bequest made by a deceased person; and so whoever corrupts a bequest which was based on justice, will be punished.

As for if someone intervenes to correct a bequest in such a way that saves the deceased person from injustice which is unintentional but causes harm, or amend a bequest which is deliberately wrong, this is something which God wants, and which incurs no sin, and which God will bring to fruition with forgiveness and mercy. And so the True Lord *the Most High* teaches us that those who hear or read a bequest, must judge it according to the standards of truth, justice, and God's law; if it contradicts these, its author must revise it. We notice here that the True Lord *the Most High* describes the feeling of this person as fear of injustice, either accidental or deliberate, saying, 'But if one fears from the testator any mistake or wrong, and shall make a settlement between the parties; that shall be no wrong in him: verily, God is Forgiving, Merciful.'

The use of the word 'fear' here shows the unity of faith in the souls of the Muslims. The believer who undertakes to achieve this kind of settlement, might be neither an heir, nor a recipient of the bequest, nor the one giving the bequest, but rather might be only a witness, but this position of being a witness makes him seek a proper settlement based on the justice of faith. Every affair which involves a single believer matters to all the believers, and so if there is any injustice, this should make the believer feel fear because the result might be bad for another believer even if it is unintentional. And so we see the unity of faith; faith joins the believers to one another so that they are like a single body: if one part of it ails, the rest of it suffers restlessness and fever on account of it.

Thus, when the believer intervenes in a matter of inheritance or bequest to rectify it even though he can derive no direct advantage from doing so, the True Lord *the Most High* will reward him with the best reward.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'But if one fears from the testator any mistake or wrong, and shall make a settlement between the parties; that shall be no wrong in him: verily, God is Forgiving, Merciful.' This statement alerts us to the fact that if a person resolves to make a bequest, he should ask the advice of those around him, and should be willing to take advice from people who possess wisdom and knowledge so that grudges do not arise once the bequest becomes final, that is, when he dies. The True Lord *the Most High* has established the necessary precautions to make sure that bequests can be rectified if problems arise because the True Lord *the Most High* wants the believers to support one another with the unity of faith. And so the problem of corruption must be guarded against before it takes place, which is why the Messenger of God said:

The likeness of the one who keeps to God's limits and the one who transgresses them is that of a group of people who draw lots for places on a ship, some of them getting a place on the upper deck, and some of them on the lower so that when the ones on the lower deck need to drink, they have to go to the upper deck to get it, and so they say, 'If we make a hole in our half, we will not need to bother the people above!' if they leave them to do as they want, they will all be ruined; if they prevent them from doing it, they will all be saved.⁽¹⁾ This Noble

(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari and At-Tirmidhi, and by Ahmad in his Musnad, on the authority of An-Nu'man ibn Bashir.

Hadith gives an example of the vital importance of assistance and advice amongst the believers as a way of protecting them. These people drew lots to decide their places on a ship, and drawing lots is a completely impartial way of selection. Some of them got places on the lower deck depending on what lot they drew, and others got places on the upper deck. Those who were on the lower deck wanted some water, and so one of them suggested that they bore a hole in the ship to get the water, justifying this by saying that such an action would not disturb the people on the upper deck of the ship. Had they gone ahead with this, and had the people on the upper deck not stopped them, they would all have drowned; but if those on the upper deck had intervened, they would have stopped everyone from drowning. This is the case with the boundaries God has set: the believers must counsel one another to ensure that they are observed so that no one should say, ‘What happens to other people is none of my business’ because the affairs of the Muslims should concern every Muslim. So we have a verse of which our master Abu Bakr *God be pleased with him* said, ‘There is a verse which you read in the wrong way,’ i.e. which you understand incorrectly; the verse being God’s instruction to the believers to be afraid of temptation: the evil doers among them will not be the only ones on whom it will light: And they should know that God is severe in punishment.

Our Sheikh, Hassanain Makhoul, former Grand Mufti of Egypt, explained this verse thus: That is, beware of God’s test in the form of hardships which will afflict you, and will afflict both the sinners and everyone else, in the form of trials, drought, inflation, prevalence of tyrants, and so on; and the meaning is a warning to avoid the sins which cause these tests, such as the acceptance and approval of evil and heretical beliefs, and the dissimulation of enjoining what is good, and disunity concerning the True Lord *the Most High*, and the failure to observe God’s laws, and the open spread of sins, and so on. Al-Bukhari narrates that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘Woe to the Arabs on account of an approaching evil!’ It was said to him, ‘Will we be destroyed when some of us are righteous?’ He said, ‘Yes, if wickedness prevails.’⁽¹⁾

(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his *Sahih* in the section *Al-Fitan*.

So, the Muslim should not think that he is not responsible for the corruption that spreads through society, but rather, he should warn of it and call attention to it. This is why we find that God in His wisdom decreed that the indemnity should be paid by the family of the murderer because it might have been the case that they saw that he was beginning to act wickedly, but did nothing to stop him; had they controlled him at the outset, they would not have ended up having to pay the indemnity. And so we see that God *the Most High* says, 'But if one fears from the testator any mistake or wrong....' That is, be careful not to say 'This is none of my business;' no; it indeed does concern you, and you should try to bring about a settlement between the recipient of the bequest and the heir. God *the Most High* says, '...that shall be no wrong in him....' This means that he will not be counted as one of those who alter the bequest, of whom we spoke when we examined the previous verse; rather, you will be rewarded for intervening because you have not changed the truth into falsehood, but rather, you have removed a falsehood and replaced it with the truth; and so you soften the heart of the heir about what was taken from him, and you uphold the balance of justice by giving good advice so that he is willing to accept that the bequest be given after it has been altered to meet the demands of God's law. God wants justice to be established, and common purity shared by the believers so that the bequest is not tainted by wickedness

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ
عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

**You who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was
prescribed for those before you, so that you may be mindful
of God [183] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 183)**

The True Lord *the Most High* begins this noble verse by paving the way for the coming command, which is fasting. It is as though He were saying, 'O you who believe in Me, and love Me: I have ordained fasting upon you.' If a command comes from one in whom you believe, you trust that He is giving you the command for your own good. For example – and God is beyond

compare – suppose that you are telling your son to do something which is difficult but will result in benefit. You do not say to him, ‘Son, do such-and-such,’ but rather, you use more endearing terms, saying for example, ‘My boy, do such-and-such.’ It is as though you are saying to him, ‘O my child, do not judge this difficult thing I ask you to do according to the standards of your mind which has not reached maturity, but rather take it according to the standards of your father’s knowledge and experience.’

Believers take God’s address to them with the words ‘O you who believe’ according to the standard of love for all the commands that come from Him *the Exalted* even if they are difficult. By their acceptance of faith, the believers enter into a contract of faith with the True Lord. He *the Exalted* does not command those who do not believe in Him to fast because they have not entered into an agreement of faith with Him, and so they will be cast into perdition.

Fasting (*siyam*) is a form of abstinence, since the verb to fast (*sama*) means also to abstain. The term is used in the verse where the True Lord *the Most High* commands Mary, Mother of Jesus *peace be upon them*, that if she should see any human being, she should say to him that she has vowed *sawm* (abstinence from speech) to The Most Merciful; hence, she may not speak today to any mortal (*Maryam*: 26). This abstinence (*sawm*) means to abstain from speaking. So the meaning of fasting is to abstain; but the meaning of fasting in the Sacred Law is to abstain from the desires of the stomach and the private parts from dawn until sunset.

The principle of fasting does not differ from one era to another; fasting was a fundamental devotional act for the religions which came before Islam, but it took the form either of a complete abstention from food or an abstention from certain kinds of food like the Christian way of fasting. Fasting is therefore a universal religious discipline although the exact days in which it is offered and the form of abstention it involves, differ. The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the noble verse by saying, ‘...that you may fear God.’

We know that the meaning of the fear of God is that we place a barrier between ourselves and God’s attributes of Majesty, and that we fear God’s wrath, and that we fear the fire which is a manifestation of God’s Majesty.

God *the Most High* says, '...that you may fear God,' that is, that we refine and hone our behaviour so that we steer clear of sins; the soul's inclination to sin comes from its materialistic desire for things; and as we know, fasting weakens materialistic desire and helps to keep it under control. Therefore, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* says to youths and others besides them, 'O young people, those of you who can do so should marry, for it aids you to lower your gaze and guard your chastity; and those who cannot, should fast, for it shall be a shield for him.'⁽¹⁾

It is as though fasting cuts off the materialistic desire in the young person's body. Less food means less fuel for the body, and this in turn lessens the voracity which pushes people to commit sin. Fasting in *Ramadan* offers a person virtue for a whole month, and he tastes the sweetness of virtue and so keeps it up after *Ramadan* ends. The True Lord *the Most High* does not ask you to be virtuous during *Ramadan* only, but rather, He *the Most High* chose *Ramadan* to be the time when we train ourselves to live virtuously so that it will continue afterwards throughout our whole life. When God elects a time, place, or person, the purpose of this is not simply to exalt the time, place, or person; rather, when God chooses a messenger, He wants the effect of this messenger's election to be spread to all people. And so we find that the history of the messengers is full of hardship and toil, which shows that the messenger bears the hardship and toil of his message himself; and so God has not chosen him simply to exalt him, but rather, He chose him to make him an example for others.

In the same way, God *the Most High* elects certain periods of time, not to exalt them above all other times, but rather because He *the Exalted* wants the special qualities of this time to spread throughout all other times, such as His election of the days of *Ramadan*. And the True Lord *the Most High* elects certain places so that their special qualities will spread to all places. We hear people say, 'I visited Mecca and Medina, and tasted the sweetness of purity and enlightenment, and I forgot about everything else.' The one who says this thinks that he is praising the place, forgetting that the place itself will rejoice

(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, An-Nasa'i, Ibn Maja, Ahmad, and Al-Baihaqi.

if its specialness spreads to all other places. If you go to Mecca to visit the Sacred Mosque, and go to Medina to visit the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, you should also remember wherever you go that God is present everywhere, and that if you establish the pillars of Islam and behave with good Islamic conduct, you thereby draw nearer to God and to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*.

It is true that when you are within the confines of the Mosque of God, your acts of worship are characterised by acute consciousness and sound intention; it is as though whilst you are in God's Mosque and in the company of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, you would be ashamed to commit any sin. When you hear the call of 'God is Great!' you go to pray with humility, and you do not harm anyone. So why do you not maintain this behaviour at all times and in all places? You can invoke a good devotional intention in any place, and you will find the same spiritual purity.

So, when God *the Most High* elects a time or a place, or elects a person, the True Lord *the Most High* only intends thereby that the election of this person extends to all people, and that the election of this place extends to all places, and that the election of this time extends to all times. And so I am amazed when I find people who begin to praise God and read the Quran at the onset of *Ramadan*, and then when it finishes, they forget all about this. I say: is the purpose of *Ramadan* to administer the religion for us, or is the purpose of *Ramadan* to train us to live righteously all the time?

God *the Most High* says, 'fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you....' This indicates to us that Muslims were not unique in the act of fasting, but rather, there were others before them who fasted, although the exact forms of the fast differed. When the True Lord *the Most High* said '...Fasting is prescribed to you...' this was the affirmation of the basic concept of fasting; and the True Lord *the Most High* then gives the details of this concept, saying:

أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَاتٍ فَمَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ مَّرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِّنْ
 أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ وَعَلَى الَّذِينَ يُطِيقُونَهُ فِدْيَةٌ طَعَامُ مِسْكِينٍ فَمَنْ تَطَوَّعَ
 خَيْرًا فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَهُ وَأَن تَصُومُوا خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٨٤﴾

Fast for a specific number of days, but if one of you is ill, or on a journey, on other days later. For those who can fast only with extreme difficulty, there is a way to compensate feed a needy person. But if anyone does good of his own accord, it is better for him, and fasting is better for you, if only you knew [184] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 184)

The word ‘days’ indicates a period of time, and it is not specific; God says of these days that they are ‘a certain number’, meaning that they are a small and exactly defined number of days. After this, the True Lord *the Most High* clarifies for us when these days of fasting are to be, saying:

شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنْزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِّنَ الْهُدَى
 وَالْفُرْقَانِ فَمَنْ شَهِدَ مِنْكُمُ الشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ وَمَنْ كَانَ مَرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ
 مِّنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمُ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ الْعُسْرَ وَلِتُكْمِلُوا الْعِدَّةَ
 وَلِتُكَبِّرُوا اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ مَا هَدٰكُمْ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿١٨٥﴾

It was in the month of Ramadan that the Qur'an was revealed as guidance for mankind, clear messages giving guidance and distinguishing between right and wrong. So any one of you who is present that month should fast, and anyone who is ill or on a journey should make up for the lost days by fasting on other days later. God wants ease for you, not hardship. He wants you to complete the prescribed period and to glorify Him for having guided you, so that you may be thankful [185] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 185)

So the period of fasting is the month of *Ramadan*; and because He *the Exalted* well knows the contingencies that might affect this command, He makes allowances for them. God's legislation of dispensations for contingencies tells us that it is not right for anyone to circumvent the proper definition of

contingencies which God has legislated. Some of those people who indulge in superficial philosophising, like to make up their own contingencies to allow themselves to abandon God's law. Some of them might justify this by using God's words: 'God does not burden a soul with more than it is well able to bear...' (*al-Baqara*: 286).

We say: You understand and define the words 'well able to bear' according to your own way of thinking and then you use this to define your responsibilities, despite the fact that the One Who created you decides your responsibilities, and He well knows that you are able to bear them, and He *the Exalted* only commands you with what you are able to bear. This is proved by the fact that the Lawgiver *the Exalted* gives dispensations for the occasions when it is not possible for someone to meet the responsibility. Let us consider the mercy of the True Lord *the Most High* when He says, '...and whoever is sick or on a journey - then an equal number of other days....' The word 'sick' is a nonspecific word, for which you can be your own witness, or a skilled Muslim doctor may tell you that if you fast, you will make yourself sick. Sickness can sometimes be chronic, in which case you must make up for the missed fasting by feeding a poor person.

Likewise, the True Lord *the Most High* exempts you from fasting if you are 'on a journey.' The word 'journey' (in Arabic *safar*) is derived from a root meaning 'to appear' or 'to be uncovered;' for example when we use the verb *asfara*, we mean that morning has broken. The word 'journey' means to move from the place where you live to another place, and so every time you take a step, new things appear to you, and the place you go to is also new to you even if you are used to going there because every time it is different because of the changing conditions time brings. It is true that some buildings and streets do not change, but what do change are the conditions that accompany them. It is also true that the conditions of travel in our times are very different from how they were in the past.

In the past, travelling meant to endure great hardships, but if we compare the travel of yesterday to that of today from the side of accommodation, we find that it is today's travel with today's accommodation which is difficult. It is strange that whenever people discuss this dispensation today, they discuss it

in order to prevent it. We say to them: You should know that God's legislation of this dispensation makes it a requirement of the Sacred Law. Jaber ibn 'Abdullah *God be pleased with him* relates that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was once on a travel when he saw a crowd and a man who had sought shade from the sun. He asked, 'What is wrong with him?' They replied, 'He is fasting.' He said, 'It is not pious to fast while travelling.'⁽¹⁾

When we read the text of the Quran, we find that it says, '...and whoever is sick or on a journey - then an equal number of other days....' That is, the very fact that one is travelling means that he should eat and make up the fast on another day. This means that God does not accept that you fast. It is true that He *the Exalted* did not say, 'Eat,' but the very fact that you are temporarily sick or on a journey means that you should fast on other days; for you do not make the rules up for yourself.

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* is a good example for us, and he prohibited fasting on the day of *Eid al-Fitr* because its very name means 'the feast of breaking the fast,' and because it is a time for coming together to celebrate the end of the fast and the passing of the test; and so there should be no fasting on this day. To fast on the first day of *Eid* is a sin, but to fast on its second day is permissible which is shown by the Hadith narrated by Abu Hurayra *God be pleased with him* which states: 'The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* forbade fasting on two days: the festival of *Fitr* (breaking the fast) and the festival of *Adha* (sacrifice).'⁽²⁾

Someone might say, 'But fasting in *Ramadan* is not like fasting on any other days because *Ramadan* is the month in which the Quran was sent down.' I reply: It is fasting which is honoured by its being in the month of the Quran; moreover, the One Who sent down the Quran and prescribed fasting in *Ramadan* is also the One *the Exalted* Who gave the dispensation for the sick person and the traveller to eat, and transferred their fast to other days outside *Ramadan*, and He *the Exalted* is well able to give these other days the same purity He gives to the one who fasts in *Ramadan*. When the True Lord

(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari in *Kitab As-sawm*

(2) Narrated by Muslim

the Most High prescribed fasting in *Ramadan*, He wanted this limited time – the time of *Ramadan* – to extend to a wider time, namely the whole year round. We fast *Ramadan* in summer and we fast it in winter, in autumn and in spring; and so *Ramadan* passes through all the days of the year.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...and as for those who are able to keep it [but with hardship, and so break it], the expiation of this shall be providing sustenance for a poor person....’ To be able to afford (*yuteeq*) means to be capable, and so if they can afford it, this means that they are capable of doing it, and are strong enough to do it; and the compensation here is to feed a needy person.

Someone might ask: if a person is able to fast, why would he be allowed to forgo fasting in exchange for compensation, namely feeding a needy person? I say that this verse shows that the obligation of fasting came gradually, just as the True Lord *the Most High* gradually introduced the Islamic system of estate division, which was first confined to bequests and then finalized as a system of inheritance. In the same way, God wanted to take the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from a situation where they were not fasting at all to one in which they were given the choice whether to fast or not; for at first they did not fast, and then later they were commanded to fast and were given no choice about it, and so it is as though fasting was originally prescribed as voluntary, and then once the Muslims had got used to fasting, the True Lord *the Most High* sent down His command: ‘...So whoever of you is present in the month, let him fast it....’ In this latter verse, the True Lord *the Most High* does not mention any sacrifice or expiation. So fasting was at first a matter of choice according to God’s words ‘...and as for those who are able to keep it [but with hardship, and so break it], the expiation of this shall be providing sustenance for a poor person....’ And then the final ruling came and fasting became a fixed obligation for the month of *Ramadan*. ‘The month of *Ramadan* [is that] in which the Quran was sent down, a guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion. ‘So whoever of you is present in the month, let him fast it....’ And so there was no longer any possibility for those who were able to fast to exempt themselves by making a sacrifice; as for those who were unable to fast, like the sick and the elderly, if a Muslim doctor tells you that your sickness is incurable, then you do not

have to fast any other days to make up what you miss but rather you must make an expiation in lieu of them.

The prescription of fasting came gradually like many of the laws which meant people had to change their habits, such as wine, for example, and gambling, and estate division; these were all things which God wanted to establish gradually. Someone might ask, 'If fasting was originally a matter of choice, then why, after speaking about the expiatory sacrifice for it, did the True Lord *the Most High* then say, '...And he who of his own accord volunteers a good work, shall derive good from it...'? (*al-Baqara*: 184)

I say: When fasting was still optional, it was also necessary that the door to goodness and devotion remain opened; and so if someone fasted and also fed a needy person, this was accepted from him, and if he fasted and fed two needy people this was even better. If someone offers devotion to God without limit, God will reward him without limit; and if he offers to God in a limited way, God will reward him in a limited way. The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...and good shall it be for you to fast...' (*al-Baqara*: 184). This was a further step towards the final obligatory status of fasting, which He finally affirmed by saying, '...So whoever of you is present in the month, let him fast it....' In this latter verse, God *the Most High* did not say '...and good shall it be for you to fast...' (*al-Baqara*: 184) because it had gone from a matter of choice to a matter of obligation.

So, fasting is a way to discipline a person, and it existed before the True Lord *the Most High* sent our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; and when the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* came, fasting was at first an option for the Muslims, and then it was prescribed as an obligation. At first God prescribed fasting for a certain number of days, and then explained to us that these days meant the month of *Ramadan*.

What makes sense to me is that God first prescribed fasting to be on a certain number of days, namely three days out of every month, namely the tenth, twentieth and thirtieth of every month. These were the certain number of days that God prescribed for fasting, and everyone had the choice on those days, if they were able to fast, to either fast or to expiate. But when God prescribed fasting in *Ramadan*, it

became an obligatory act of worship and one of the pillars of Islam; and after that, we were told of the exemption for the ill person and the traveller.

Thus we can notice that fasting in Islam went through two stages: the first stage was that God *the Most High* prescribed fasting for a certain number of days, and we have explained how this worked; and the second stage was that fasting was prescribed for a particular time: the month of *Ramadan*. To the scholars who hold the opinion that it is permissible for the sick person and the traveller to refuse to break their fast because they do not want to miss out on the wisdom of God's law, we say: When the True Lord *the Most High* gives dispensations, He must have a wise reason for doing so which is above the level of our own deduction; this is affirmed by the fact that the True Lord *the Most High* said, '...and whoever is sick or on a journey....'

The ruling here is to make up for these fasts on other days. Notice here that God did not say, 'And he that breaks his fast shall fast for the same number of other days'; this means that the fast for the sick and the traveller is transferred to the time when he returns from his journey or is cured of his illness. So those scholars who say, 'It is a dispensation, and a person is free to take it or leave it' must have interpreted the Quranic text thus: '...and whoever is sick or on a journey...' and breaks his fast, '...then [shall fast instead] an equal number of other days....' We say: If a text can be understood without any need for subjective interpretation, it is more correct to take it as it is than to explain it in a way which requires subjective interpretation. Our understanding of expressions should not be a matter of subjective taste, but rather a matter of obedience; for obedience takes precedence over taste.

So, those who say this have not taken into account the fact that God wants to lighten our burden. Moreover, what prevents us from understanding that the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to make a clear dispensation for the sick and the traveller, and so ordained that both of their fasts take place on other days? And so if he fasts in *Ramadan* and he is sick or on a journey, his fast is not counted; that is, his fast is not considered valid and is not accepted from him. This is the meaning I incline towards; but we take into consideration here that the meaning of sickness and travel are those things which put all of a person's faculties out of balance.

What is the meaning of 'month' in God's words '...So whoever of you is present in the month, let him fast it....'? The Arabic word for month (*shahr*) is derived from the root meaning 'to make plain and apparent,' and we still use the word when we speak about deals, meaning a public announcement of a deal so that two deals are not made for the same thing. So the word *shahr* means to make something plain and obvious; but why is the period of time called a *shahr*? It is called so since it has a sign which shows it. We know we cannot determine the start of a month using the sun, but rather, the sun can be used to determine the time of day; a full day lasts from sunrise to sunset, and is divided into daytime and night.

But the sun has no obvious signs to indicate the beginning of a month, but rather, it is the moon which tells us this by the new moon which comes at the beginning of each month, looking like an old date-stalk. So the new moon identifies the month, and the sun identifies the time of day, and we need them both to tell the time.

The True Lord *the Most High* links acts of worship with clear signs of the universe such as the new moon. After this we use the sun to tell days because the new moon does not tell you the time of day. The new moon appears after it had waned and disappeared, and the birth of the new moon is a sign and an indication that the month has begun, and so the first acts of worship of *Ramadan* begin at night because the sign – the new moon – comes at night. We look for the new moon when the sun goes down, and if we see it, we say that *Ramadan* has begun. This never changes because the day never overtakes the night except for one devotion which is the standing at 'Arafa at the pilgrimage. The night that comes after it is considered as an extension of the day of 'Arafa.

The word 'Ramadan' is derived from the root (*r-m-d*), which means scorching heat. The verb *ramada* means for a person to feel burning in their belly because of thirst, and *ramda* means hot sand. If you use the verb *ramada* to refer to an animal, it means that the heat has harmed the skin of its feet so that it cannot put them on the ground. So the word *Ramadan* is derived from the term for excessive heat. It seems that when people gave names to the months, they named *Ramadan* at a time when the weather was very hot and so they called it *Ramadan*; likewise, when they named the two months of *Rabi'*, the

weather was like that of spring (*rabi'*), and when they named the two months of Jumada, the water was cold enough to freeze (*jamuda*) at the time.

So, it is as though they noticed the characteristics of the months at the time they named them, and then the particular Arabic way of defining months by the cycle of the moon moved around the solar year so that *Ramadan* fell in summer, and in autumn; but at the time it was named, the weather was very hot.

Imagine a person has a son who is very beautiful, so he calls him 'Jamil' ('beautiful'), and then later the boy contracts smallpox (we seek refuge from harm in God) so that his face is blemished. The name fitted at the time it was given, even if something happened later which seemed to be contrary to the meaning of this name. It is as though when the True Lord *the Most High* inspired minds to give the month this name, it was a sign of the hardship that the one who fasts would have to endure in *Ramadan*. After this, God *the Most High* gave it a distinction which confirmed why it was chosen, which is that it was the month in which the Quran was sent down from on high. The Quran came as a way of moral guidance, and fasting is abstaining from nutrients; and so the status of this noble month is that it disciplines the body and disciplines the soul. It was therefore appropriate that the duty which imparts physical and moral discipline should have been prescribed for the same time in which the Quran was sent down to deliver its moral teachings.

'The month of *Ramadan* [is that] in which the Quran was sent down....' When you hear the words '...the Quran was sent down...' keep in mind that we have three similar but distinct words *anzala*, *nazzala*, and *nazala*; and you will find that the word *anzala* ('to send down from high') is invariably ascribed to God *the Most High*: He was the One Who *anzala* ('sent down') the Quran on the Night of Power ('*Laylat al-Qadr*') (*al-Qadr*: 1).

As for the word *nazala* ('descend from high'), God *the Most High* says that it was the Faithful Spirit that has come down with it (i.e. the Quran) (*ash-Shu'ara*: 193). And the True Lord *the Most High* says that angels descend on the Night of Power (*al-Qadr*: 4).

So, the verb *anzala* is used exclusively for God alone, whilst the verb *nazzala* refers to the angels, and the verb *nazala* ('to come down') refers to

the Faithful Spirit, Gabriel *peace be upon him*. So it is as though the verb *anzala*, with its prefixed letter *hamza* (making it a transitive verb) describes how the Quran was taken from place in the Preserved Tablet to be revealed to mankind and fulfil its purpose. From the words *nazala* and *nazzala* we understand that the True Lord *the Most High* sent the Quran from high in the Preserved Tablet to the sky of the material world, from where it was then revealed gradually in instalments according to circumstances and events. So it was sent down from high in one movement in *Ramadan*. People criticise us and say, ‘How can you say that the Quran was sent down from high in *Ramadan*, when you also say that the Quran came down at different times, so, it came down here, and came down there, and that its coming down lasted the length of the Muhammadan mission?’

We say to them: We did not say that it *nazala* (‘came down’), but rather that, it was *unzil* (‘...sent down...’), which means that it was sent forth from the Higher Knowledge to fulfil its purpose in existence; and in order to fulfil its purpose in existence, the Quran came down ‘piecemeal’ according to worldly events so that rulings could come when needed and so become established on earth. If the Quran had come in one piece all at once, it might have been the case that we had a ruling, but did not know what it meant; but since the rulings did not come until we needed them, they were settled firmly in our souls.

I will give an example to illustrate this – and God *the Most High* is beyond compare – you might want to stock a medicine cabinet in the house, putting in it everything that you imagine you might need in cases of emergency, and you might get some medicine which you do not have any need for. But if you wait until the time comes when you do need the medicine, and go to the chemist’s and give them the doctor’s prescription in exchange for the medicine, there will be no risk of confusion or a mix-up. In the same way, when God wanted to give a ruling to deal with a particular issue, He did not wait until the time came to send the ruling through the angels from the Preserved Tablet, but rather, the ruling had already been sent to the sky of the material world, and so He told the angels to take it down, and Gabriel *peace be upon him* took it whenever the True Lord *the Most High* willed it to be taken down during the mission of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, or the time when God *the Most High* wanted there to be a ruling to solve a particular problem.

So, when people try to raise doubts about this, we say: No. We possess a very precise Arabic language, and there is a difference between *anzala*, *nazzala*, and *nazala*. The word *nazala* ('to descend' or 'to bring down') refers to revelation, and also to the one who brings down the revelation. God *the Most High* says that it was the Faithful Spirit that has come down with it (i.e. the Quran) (*ash-Shu'ara*: 193). And He *the Exalted* says that in truth He has sent down the Quran; and in truth it has come down (*al-Isra*: 105).

Some of the idolaters exclaimed, 'Why was the Quran not sent down in one piece all at once?' Look at the precision of the way in which God wanted to reveal the Quran: The True Lord *the Most High* registers their statement by saying that disbelievers ask why the Quran has not been sent down on the Messenger from high in one single revelation. He answers them by saying that it has been revealed in this manner so that God would strengthen his heart by it; and He has arranged its component parts well (*al-Furqan*: 32).

If we reflect on the words of the True Lord *the Most High* 'in this manner,' this means that He *the Exalted* revealed the Quran in the way in which He did in order to strengthen the hearts of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers. Had it been revealed all at once, it would have represented a single charge; yet every event and incident in the march of the call to God required strength. And so whenever something happened, a piece/instalment of the Quran would be revealed, and by this the True Lord *the Most High* would strengthen the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. I will give a simple example to illustrate this – and God is beyond compare, and absolved of all likeness – if your son wants a new outfit, will you get it for him all at once so that he gets one nice surprise, or will you get him a tie one day, and a new shirt the next day, and then get him the jacket the next? In that case, as each piece comes to him, he will have renewed joy.

Why did the True Lord *the Most High* reveal the Quran piecemeal? To strengthen the Messenger's heart by it (*al-Furqan*: 32). The meaning of 'strengthen his heart' is: You will experience all kinds of disturbances, and each of these disturbances will require you to be supported and reassured, and so each piece of the Quran will come to do this, and to illuminate the way for you. Then God *the Most High* adds that He has arranged its component parts

well (*al-Furqan*: 32). That is, We have not sent it all at once but rather, We have arranged it in a way which best suits the unfolding of events so that each piece will be acted upon, and the believers will have time to digest it, and then the next piece will come. Notice also the precision of the True Lord's expression when He gives added reason for the manner of the revelation of the Quran: that when the disbelievers taunt the Messenger with any deceptive half-truth, God would reveal to him in a Quranic instalment, the full truth thus providing him with the best explanation (*al-Furqan*: 32).

The disbelievers had objections, and they employed half-truths to make them; if the Quran had been revealed in one movement all at once, it would have overlooked this matter. Add to this that the believers also used to ask questions, and the Quran reported these queries: They ask you about such-and-such. Had the Quran been revealed in one piece, how would these questions have been answered? As long as they were bound to ask, He waited until they asked and then furnished them with answers.

So, this is the meaning of *anzala* ('sent down'); that is, it was sent down from the Preserved Tablet to fulfil its purpose in existence, and after that Gabriel *peace be upon him* took it down, or the angels took it down, according to the circumstances which the Quran came to address.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...in which the Quran was sent down, guidance for the people....' We know that the word 'guidance' means that which leads to the desired destination in the quickest way. When we put signs on uncertain roads, this is because we want the traveller to reach his destination as easily as possible. The word 'guidance' means the signs we follow which were set up by the Creator *the Most High*; for if He had left it up to people to set them up, their caprices would have conflicted with one another; and even if we supposed that they had no caprices, and all searched for the truth, and all had mature minds – even if we allowed for all this and left them to set up these directional signs, we still ask: what about the one who set up these signs: what will guide him?

So, he too must have guidance before he can use his mind to think. Moreover, the one who sets up this guidance must not stand to benefit from it in any way, and God *the Most High* is completely free of need of all creation and does

not stand to gain anything from His servants; as for mankind, if they decided their own guidance, the one who decided it would stand to benefit from it; and we have seen this with our own eyes, for the one who wanted to take the wealth of the wealthy and benefit from it invented communism, and the one who wanted to exploit the toil of others invented capitalism. These are systems which sprang from capricious desire, and none of the philosophers who invent such systems can claim that they are free of caprice: the capitalist makes his laws and inclines to his own caprice, and the communist does the same. We want someone to make laws for us without standing to benefit from the laws he makes; and no one meets these criteria except the True Lord *the Most High*, and so He alone has the right to make laws, and He alone makes laws for the benefit of mankind.

The proof of this is that man-made legal systems contradict one another because even though people may be knowledgeable, they are still ignorant of many things, no matter how hard the lawmaker might try to consider all possible future events. So man-made laws are always being amended because when the original lawmaker made the law, he did not think of contingencies which later came about, and things happened which he did not foresee, and so he said, 'This law is inadequate, and no longer suitable, we must change it.'

So, our requirement is from the one who makes the guidance and teachings which all people will follow, alongside his not benefiting from it in any way, that he also has full knowledge of the details of everything that will happen in the future. This cannot be the case with anyone except the Wise, All Knowing God, and so He instructed us not to follow other ways, lest they cause us to deviate from His way (*al-An'am*: 153).

If you follow other ways, each one made by someone's caprice, temporal laws will be made which will spell the end of everyone on earth because we will follow our own caprices which are always changing, instead of following the Guidance of He who does not stand to benefit anything from this matter. And so I say: Understand well that the true guidance which should not be resisted is the guidance of God: '...guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion....' The Quran in its entirety is 'guidance,' and the

‘criterion’ (*al-furqan*) means that which makes a clear difference between things in which truth and falsehood are unclear, and so wise revelation comes to discern truth from falsehood.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...So whoever of you is present in the month, let him fast it; and whoever is sick or on a journey - then an equal number of other days....’ When a ruling is followed by a clarification, this means that we should understand that this means: Whoever lives to see this month shall fast it if he is not sick or on a journey; this must be the case as long as God has made this ruling.

So, the one who ‘is present’ is one of two groups: there is he who ‘is present’ i.e. sees the month start and is neither sick nor on a journey – that is, he is resident in a certain place; and there is the one who is ‘...sick or on a journey - then an equal number of other days. God desires for you ease and does not desire for you hardship....’ We want to understand this text with the awareness that it has come from a Wise God. When God *the Most High* says, ‘...God desires for you ease and does not desire for you hardship...’ what does this refer to? It refers to the fact that He has exempted the sick and the traveller from fasting; and so it is as though God wants ease for you, and so if you go against this, it means that you want God to be hard on you, not easy; but God is not this way, but rather, it is you who is being hard on yourself. If fasting is truly sacred to you, and you do not want to harm your reputation, then do not break your fast in front of other people. Hold to God’s ruling ‘...then an equal number of other days...’ because if you do not, you will be making things difficult, but we say to you: No; God wants things to be easy for you. Do you care about the act of worship itself, or the One you worship? Your faith dictates that you care about the One you worship.

Here is another example which we find in our lives: Some people call the *adhan* (call for prayer), and then after it, they raise their voices and say, ‘Blessings and peace be upon you, O my master, O Messenger of God!’ They say that they do this out of love for the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, but can you show love for the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* except by doing that which he commanded? He said, ‘When you hear the call,

repeat what the *mue'dhdhin* says, and then send blessings upon me.⁽¹⁾ So the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* gave permission to the *mue'dhdhin* and the one who hears the *adhan* to send blessings upon him quietly, not for him to use the same loud voice he uses for the *adhan* and the tune of the *adhan* to send blessings on the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. This is because people might be confused, and imagine that this is part of the *adhan*. I say to the one who does this: Brother, is there no acceptable way to send blessings on the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* except with a loud voice? Indeed, you have the right to send blessings on the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, but you should do so quietly to yourself.

In the same way, if someone has to break their fast in *Ramadan* because he is sick or on a journey, we say to him: Be discreet so that you will not be a bad example to others; for people do not know that you are sick or on a journey. Be discreet so that people will not say, 'A Muslim is illegally breaking his fast.'

The True Lord *the Most High* says that He wants '...for you to complete the period...' that is so that you do not miss out on any days of fasting.

Consider the precision of the Quranic discourse when God *the Most High* says, '...and to exalt God for that [to] which He has guided you; and that you may give thanks.' The act of worship which we see as being difficult is fasting, and then after it, we are to exalt God. This is because the True Lord *the Most High* knows that when His servant obeys one of His commands despite its difficulty, such as fasting, and he bears this difficulty, God knows that when the servant feels that this act has come to an end, he will feel a kind of relief which necessitates that he give thanks to God, who commanded him to fast and helped him to do it. The meaning of 'to exalt God' is that you say, 'God is Great!' and that you thank Him for the act of worship which you had thought would be too much for you, but yet, you found in it much glory and delight; and so you say, God is Greater than all that; God is Great because when He keeps things from me. He really gives to me, and He *the Exalted* gives even when He withholds. You take the sustenance you need to live, and in *Ramadan* He gives you

(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi, Nasa'i, Ibn Maja, and Ahmad, on the authority of Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri God be pleased with him

something more than this which is the glory that appears to you therein; and you taste the sweetness of His Commands; and although you have to give up one favour, He gives you a favour which is better than it.

Apart from this, the Quranic discourse is not the discourse of a human being. We find that human beings divide books into sections and chapters, grouping similar themes together, and separating each subject into its own section, after which it moves on to another chapter. But God does not want the religion to be divided into chapters; rather, He wants the religion to be a whole unit which is integrated into the fabric of mankind. And so after He *the Exalted* says, '...and to exalt God...' He then says, '...and that you may give thanks.' This means that you will see the thing which makes you say 'God is Great' because God will do something good for you. When there is a pure relationship between the 'worshipper,' mankind, and the 'Worshipped,' God, the worshipper is certain that the Worshipped will not command him to do anything unless it is good for him; and so the servant thinks the best of his Lord, and turns to Him always, and asks Him for everything.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ
فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِلَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ ﴿١٨٦﴾

**And if My servants ask you about Me, I am near. I
respond to those who call Me, so let them respond to
Me, and believe in Me, so that they may be guided [186]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 186)**

If you have tasted the sweetness of the pure illuminations which the True Lord *the Most High* gave you through fasting, you will be moved to thank Him *the Exalted*; and so it is fitting that the True Lord *the Most High* responds to you by saying, 'And if My servants ask you about Me—indeed, I am near....' Notice that the word *idha* ('if/when') is used here, and not in ('if' but implying a lesser probability); the True Lord *the Most High* asserts to you that after you experience this sweetness you will certainly be thankful to God for His favours. In a Qudsi Hadith, He *the Exalted* says: 'Three there are whose supplication is

not refused: the one who fasts, when he completes his fasts; the just ruler; and the supplication of the oppressed. God raises it up above the clouds, and the doors to Heaven open for it, and the Lord *the Most High* says, 'By My Glory, I will give you victory, though after a while.'⁽¹⁾

He *the Exalted* will answer the call; and you might be an ordinary person, not a ruler, and you might not be oppressed, so, there remains the supplication of the one who fasts.

When you read the word 'ask' in God's Book, you will find that whenever a question is mentioned in the Noble Quran, the answer starts with a command to the Prophet to give the answer: 'Say...' as we find in the following examples. The Quran reports that the companions ask the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* about wine and gambling. The answer came mediated by the imperative 'Say': In both, there is great evil as well as some benefit for man (*al-Baqara*: 219). The same manner is followed in answer to their question as to what they should spend in God's way: 'Say': Whatever you can spare (*al-Baqara*: 219). And in answer to their question as to what they should spend on others: 'Say': Whatever of your wealth you spend (*al-Baqara*: 215).

This was the case with almost every question except for one verse when the command to answer, came beginning with 'then say' with an additional 'then.' This was the case with their question about what will happen to the mountains at the end of time. The Prophet was commanded with 'then say,' to answer them that his Lord will blast them into dust (*Ta Ha*: 105). Look at the syntactic precision: first there is 'say,' and then there is 'then say.' The implication is that on the question about wine and gambling, the question has actually been asked, while the question on the mountains has not come yet, and the verse anticipates a question that will be asked. It is as though when God gives answers to questions that have already been asked, He uses 'Say,' while when the question which is yet to be asked is mentioned, the reply given to it starts with the command 'then say,' that is, He is giving an anticipatory answer to a question that is yet to come. So there is a difference between answering a question which

(1) Narrated by At-Tirmidhi, Ibn Maja, and Imam Ahmad in his Musnad on the authority of Abu Hurayra God be pleased with him

has been asked and answering a question which will be asked, to show you that no one would surprise God *the Most High* by asking questions.

But now in the verse under discussion, we have a question followed by a direct answer, without the mediating 'say,' or 'then say': 'And if My servants ask you about Me....' He did not say 'Say: I am near,' because for Him to say 'Say' would be to add distance to the nearness, and God wanted to make nearness manifest by answering the question without using any kind of intermediary: 'And if My servants ask you about Me – indeed, I am near....' God gave the answer from Himself to His servants directly, even though the one who would transmit the answer would be His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. There is a story behind this. It is narrated that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was once asked, 'Is your Lord near so that we may have intimate discourse with Him, or is He distant so that we must call to Him?' This is because you usually call to those who are far and speak intimately with those who are near; and so to show them this nearness, He left out the word 'Say' and the True Lord *the Most High* said, 'And if My servants ask you about Me – indeed, I am near...' What is the advantage of this nearness? The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...I respond to the call of him who calls, whenever he calls upon Me....' But what are the necessary prerequisites for this?

The True Lord *the Most High* says: 'And if My servants ask you....' We know there is a difference between 'slaves' ('*abid*') and 'servants' ('*ibad*'). Although the singular form of both these Arabic words is '*abd*', there are two plurals, '*abid*' and '*ibad*'. People on earth are slaves ('*abid*') of God, but not all are servants ('*ibad*') of God. Why? It is because slaves are those who are compelled to do certain things just like everyone else; but there are those who choose to rebel against the True Lord *the Most High*, and so take rebelliousness as their decision and way of life, but the servants ('*ibad*') are the ones who choose to obey God in everything. They are compelled along with everyone else in that none of them can choose when to be born, or when to die, or how to exist; but the servants are distinguished in that for those things in which God has given them free will, they say: It is true, Lord, that You have given us free will; and we have chosen Your guidance, and we will not let our own whims control us. You have said, 'Do this,' and 'Do not do this,' and we accept commands from You, Lord.'

Your Lord does not tell you to do something unless you are capable of choosing either to do or not to do it; and He does not tell you not to do something unless you are capable of going one way or the other. So the words ‘do’ and ‘do not’ apply to matters governed by free will. The True Lord *the Most High* said ‘do’ and ‘do not,’ and then, He left certain things alone without telling you whether to do them or not so that you are free as to whether to do them or not; this is called the ‘sphere of lawful free choice.’ So, there is an aspect of free will concerning commands and prohibitions, and an aspect of free will concerning things which you can take or leave and are harmless either way. The one who takes free will and says, ‘Lord, You have given me free will, but I leave it to You, o He Who gives free will, to direct this free will as You please. I will give up my free will, and if You tell me to do something, I will do it, and if You tell me not to do something, I will not do it.’

So, the servants (‘*ibad*’) are those who take the sphere of free will and give it over to Him who created free will in them, and they say to God, ‘Even though I have free will, I entrust myself to You.’ The servants are those who leave the matter of free will to the One Who created free will. The True Lord *the Most High* describes them thus: The true servants of the Most Merciful are those who walk gently on earth, and who, whenever the foolish address them, reply with words of peace; and are those who remember their Lord far into the night, prostrating themselves and standing (*al-Furqan*: 63-64).

These are the servants of the Most Merciful; and the True Lord *the Most High* said to Satan that indeed he will have no power over His servants (*al-Hijr*: 42). Satan has power only over slaves (‘*abid*’) because he can get to them through their free will. The term ‘My servants’ (‘*ibadi*’) is only used in the Quran once to describe ‘misguided slaves’ when the Hour comes in the Afterlife, and the True Lord *the Most High* holds to account those who led people astray, asking the misguiding leaders whether it was them who led ‘My servants’ astray (*al-Furqan*: 17).

This is because when the Hour comes, there will be no free will and everyone will come under the category of ‘servants’ (‘*ibad*’); even the disbelievers will no longer have any free will. When the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘And if My servants ask you about Me – indeed, I am near; I respond to the call of him who calls, whenever he calls upon Me,...’ the servants who commit themselves to

God by following His religious way will only ask God for that which does not contradict their faith and its responsibilities.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...let them, then, respond to Me,...' because a call requires a response; and as long as you require a response to your call, have good manners with your Lord; for He *the Exalted* has called you to His way, and so respond to Him. If you wish for God *the Most High* to respond to you, heed His call '...let them, then, respond to Me....' After this, the True Lord *the Most High* speaks about 'him who calls', and He does not leave this ambiguous but rather says '...whenever he calls upon Me....,' it is as though the word 'him who calls' might leave things ambiguous as someone may indeed call, but direct his call to other than God, one who cannot possibly respond to him; we find a reference to this in the True Lord's statement that all those whom you invoke besides God are but created beings like yourselves (*al-A'raf*: 194), and in His assertion that even if you invoke them, they do not hear your call (*Fatir*: 14).

It is as though the one who calls might do so in a way which will not ensure a response to his call. Here, the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...I respond to the call of him who calls, whenever he calls upon Me....' When someone goes and calls someone who is not able to deliver, God is not responsible for answering his call.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to teach us that one might supplicate for good for oneself, but one cannot exactly specify this good because you might see something as being good when really it is bad, but as long as you are praying for it you believe it to be good. And so the basis of supplication is that you love goodness, but you might not properly understand what is good, or what the right way to goodness is. There is no dispute that you love goodness, and so the way your Lord – who has better knowledge of what is really good for you – answers your supplication might be to deny your supplication if it is not actually good for you. Therefore, when your supplication is not answered as you had hoped and as you had asked, you must not infer from this that God has not responded to you, and say, 'Why did God not respond to me?' Indeed He did respond to you, but He protected you from you the foolishness of your supplication, or that which you did not realise was bad for you. The One Whom

you call upon is Wise, and He says: I shall give you what is good, and that which I know to be good is better than that which you suppose to be good; and what is good for you is that this supplication not be answered.

I will give an example to illustrate this – and God is beyond compare – your young son might ask you to buy him a gun, and he imagines that having a gun is a good thing; but you put off his request and say, ‘I will buy you a gun some other time, God willing,’ and you procrastinate, and you do not get him the gun. Does the fact that you did not get him the gun as he wanted mean that you have denied him something good? Not allowing your son to have a gun is beneficial, safe, and good for him.

So, goodness is always determined by a wise consideration of matters; you prevent your son from having a gun because you see that he is a child and that he plays with his friends, and something might happen to make him lose his self-control and result in someone hurting him, or him hurting them because of this gun.

Likewise, the supplication you make might not be answered because this would be bad for you. The True Lord *the Most High* explains that man often prays for things that are bad as if he were praying for something that is good: for man is prone to be hasty in his judgments (*al-Isra*’: 11). This is why God *the Most High* says that man is a creature of haste; but in time He shall make obvious to people the truth of His signs (*al-Anbiya*’: 37).

Scholars say that if the intention behind supplication is to express humility and servitude, this is virtuous; as for the answer, it is subject to God’s will. If you measure your share from supplications by how often they are answered, you are not judging things properly. Your benefit from supplication is that it is an action of worship and humility before God; for you only call on Him because you believe that your own means as a human being cannot avail you with this matter, and so you ask Him who rules all. God *the Most High* says in a Qudsi Hadith, ‘Whoever is too preoccupied by remembering Me to ask Me, I shall give him that which is better than what I give to those who ask.’⁽¹⁾

(1) Narrated by *Al-Bukhari* in *At-Tarikh*

Let us take a lesson from that which the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* taught ‘Aisha, Mother of the Believers *God be pleased with her*. She once asked the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* about the Night of Power, ‘If I live to see the Night of Power, how should I supplicate to God?’ Notice how the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* taught the Mother of the Believers Aisha *God be pleased with her* to supplicate for broad, comprehensive goodness; he said to her, ‘Say, “O God, You love to pardon, so pardon me”’⁽¹⁾.

There is no favour better than pardon, and no goodness better than pardon; so I should not pray, ‘Give me, give me,’ because this might come under the impart of the True Lord’s statement that man often prays for things that are bad as if he were praying for something that is good: for man is prone to be hasty in his judgments (*al-Isra’*: 11).

So to those who say, ‘I called my Lord and He did not answer me,’ we say: Do not be so unperceptive because it is good for you that you are not granted all you ask for; for God will give you goodness at the time He wills.

The True Lord *the Most High* sometimes lets events unfold in society which bring you something of what you asked for and then show you that it was bad for you so that you know that when God withheld it from you this was totally for your own good. And so supplication has prerequisites, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* urged us to make sure our livelihoods are lawful. In a Noble Hadith related by Abu Hurayra *God be pleased with him* we read: ‘... Then he mentioned a man who travels far, and is dishevelled and covered in dust, who raises his hands to the sky and says, ‘O Lord, O Lord’ – yet his food is unlawful, and his drink is unlawful, and his clothes are unlawful, and he is nourished with the unlawful – how shall his prayer be answered?’⁽²⁾

The Messenger reveals to us here how the ‘equipment’ of the one who supplicates can be defective. So the lack of response to the supplication can

(1) *This is the wording of the Hadith as narrated by At-Tirmidhi who declared it to be sound and authentic. It was also narrated by Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak, who declared it to be authentic according to the criteria of Al-Bukhari and Muslim.*

(2) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih*

be either because the supplication is made with defective equipment, or because you supplicate for something you think is good for you but which God sees is not, and so He leads you to the sanctuary of His wisdom and denies you the thing which would be bad for you.

Moreover, the response might be veiled from you because if He gave you what you wanted, He would have given you only the good things of this transient world; but He loves you, and so preserves the response for you to be a never-ending good; and such an advantage is only attained to by the elite few. And there are other advantages besides this, represented by the fact that as long as supplication is an expression of humility and devoutness, God might grant you that which was mentioned in the Sacred Hadith: ‘God descends to the earth’s sky and says, “Who calls unto Me that I might answer him, or asks Me that I might give unto him?” Then He says, “Who would give a loan to One Who is neither lacking, nor unjust?”’⁽¹⁾

Since a person is attached to certain things, which he loves, when he does not get them, he keeps praying, ‘O Lord.’ God loves to hear this call from this kind of servant, so, He *the Exalted* says, ‘There are those among My servants whose calls I love, and so I send upon them trials so that they will say, “O Lord”’. A believing person does not judge the success of his supplication based on whether it is answered or not, but rather, the success of his supplication is, as the True Lord *the Most High* commands His Messenger to proclaim to the believers that no weight or value would his Lord grant them, were it not for their prayers (*al-Furqan*: 77).

The meaning of Lordship and servitude is that you always say ‘O Lord.’ I will give an example to illustrate this – and God is beyond compare. A father might give his son pocket-money once every month so that the boy takes his monthly allowance and then vanishes for a month without bothering to see his father. But if the father gives his son pocket-money every day, the son will wait for the father, and if the father is a little late, the son will stand at the door waiting for his father to come; the father will have made the son attached to his need so that he can enjoy seeing him.

(1) Narrated by Muslim, Abu Dawud, and At-Tirmidhi

The True Lord *the Most High* makes a condition for the answering of supplications, which is that the servant also responds to God *the Most High* in what He calls him to, whereupon the servant will be worthy of calling God in supplication. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* says in a Sacred Hadith, 'Whoever is too preoccupied by remembering Me to ask Me, I shall give him that which is better than what I give to those who ask.'⁽¹⁾

An example of this is: When our master Abraham *peace be upon him* was being cast into the fire, the archangel Gabriel *peace be upon him* asked him, 'Are you in need of anything?' He did not deny that he was in need, and he was not arrogantly refusing to admit he was in danger, but rather, he said to Gabriel, 'As to you, no.' He was in need, but not to Gabriel *peace be upon him* because he knew well that his rescue from the fire – whose nature was to burn, and into which he was being cast – was not something that any created being could control, but rather, it was something that none could govern save He Who created fire. And so he said to Gabriel *peace be upon him*, 'As to you, no; His knowledge of my state means I have no need to ask.' And so the decree came from the True Lord *the Most High* to the fire to be coolness and safety for Abraham (*al-Anbiya'*: 69).

We can also learn from Imam Ali *God be pleased with him* when someone came to visit him when he was ill and found him moaning, and said to him, 'Are you moaning and you are Abu Al-Hasan?' He replied, 'I have no need to show bravado to God.'

So, God's words 'And if My servants ask you about Me – indeed, I am near; I respond to the call of him who calls, whenever he calls upon Me: let them, then, respond to Me, and believe in Me...' indicate the importance of responding to God's teachings. 'And believe in Me,' that is, let them believe in Him *the Exalted* as a Wise God. Not everyone who asks will find his exact request answered because divinity necessitates wisdom which gives to everyone who calls that which is good for him, not according to his own criteria but according to the criteria of He Who answers the call.

(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari in *At-Tarikh*

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by saying, ‘...so that they may be rightly guided.’ What does following the right way mean? It means to reach the way which leads to what is good and right. This verse came after the verse ‘The month of *Ramadan* [is that] in which the Quran was sent down, a guidance for the people...’ in order to show us that the purity of fasting makes the one who fasts worthy of calling God; and the success you gain from this call might not be that it is answered, but rather, what you gain from is that it is an act of worship; and in order to explain to us some of the Divine Commands to mankind, the True Lord *the Most High* then tells us what is permissible for us to do in *Ramadan* in the following verse. The True Lord *the Most High* says:

أُحِلَّ لَكُمْ لَيْلَةَ الصِّيَامِ الرَّفْتُ إِلَىٰ نِسَائِكُمْ هُنَّ لِيَاسٌ لَّكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لِيَاسٌ لَّهُنَّ عَلِمَ اللَّهُ
أَنَّكُمْ كُنْتُمْ تُخْتَانُونَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَعَفَا عَنْكُمْ فَالْآنَ بَشِّرُوهُمْ
وَابْتَغُوا مَا كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا حَتَّىٰ يَبَيِّنَ لَكُمُ الْخَيْطُ الْأَبْيَضُ مِنَ الْخَيْطِ
الْأَسْوَدِ مِنَ الْفَجْرِ ثُمَّ أَتَمُوا الصِّيَامَ إِلَىٰ اللَّيْلِ وَلَا تُبَشِّرُوهُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ عَلَكُونَ فِي الْمَسَاجِدِ
تِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ فَلَا تَقْرُبُوهَا كَذَٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَالنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٨٧﴾

You [believers] are permitted to lie with your wives during the night of the fast: they are [close] as garments to you, as you are to them. God was aware that you were betraying yourselves, so He turned to you in mercy and pardoned you: now you can lie with them – seek what God has ordained for you – eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct from the black. Then fast until nightfall. Do not lie with them during the nights of your devotional retreat in the mosques: these are the bounds set by God, so do not go near them. In this way God makes His messages clear to people, that they may guard themselves against doing wrong [187]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 187)

After telling us the proper manners of supplication, and integrating and including it with the devotion of fasting, the True Lord *the Most High* now clarifies for us the proper way to conduct marital relations when fasting. This

integration and intermixing of different themes in the Quran occurs to make us understand that the religion is a single integrated entity which addresses all of mankind's faculties, and God does not want one faculty ever to supersede or overrule any other.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'It has been made permissible for you on the night preceding fasting to approach your wives....' When you hear the words 'It has been made permissible for you,' this suggests that the thing which is being declared as lawful was prohibited before this, and the thing which God here declares to be lawful was the very thing which is prohibited when fasting; for fasting means to refrain from the desires of the stomach and the desires of the private parts. It is as though before this verse was sent down, it was forbidden to go to one's wife during the night of the fast so that in the beginning fasting meant to abstain from food from just before dawn until the moment of sunset, and for spouses to abstain from relations both at night and at day. And so sexual relations on the nights before the fast were forbidden, and they were also forbidden to eat or drink after the night prayer, and after sleeping, until they opened the fast at sunset.

A man said to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, 'I came home and found that my family had not prepared any food for me, and then I slept, and when I woke, O Messenger of God, I realised I could not eat, and so I am very weak.' And so God made two things lawful: The first was to go to one's wife at night, and the second was the ruling in God's words: '...and eat and drink until the white thread becomes distinct to you from the black thread at dawn....' That is, eat and drink until dawn, even if you have during that time. This was a dispensation for all the Muslims, just like the earlier dispensation which was for the sick and the traveller. The earlier dispensation was specifically meant to address the difficulty fasting poses for the traveller or the sick; as for this new dispensation, it was general for every Muslim, and was a way to deepen the understanding of the matter.

The True Lord *the Most High* delayed this dispensation somewhat in order for every Muslim to appreciate the extent of the alleviation; for he would have had experience of being exposed to the risk of breaking the rules, and then God lifted this from him. Consider how this Quranic verse expresses it: '...they are

clothing for you and you are clothing for them. God knows that you used to deceive yourselves....' The words 'used to deceive yourselves' inform us that a person is not strong enough to abstain from sexual desire all the time; and so if you were left to this you would deceive yourself, and then He decreed a dispensation for you so that you would be aware of God's favour upon you.

Some of the dispensations that God gives to His servants in their responsibilities are dispensations which come alongside the ruling, whilst others are dispensations of alleviation which come after the ruling comes in order for the True Lord *the Most High* to show that had He not done so, you would have been exposed to the risk of self-deception and sin. '...God knows that you used to deceive yourselves....' Look at the bravery of 'Umar *God be pleased with him* when he went to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'O Messenger of God, I acted as a young man would act!' And those who were hungry also went to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and said that they were hungry. And so the ruling came to accommodate all these circumstances: so, during the day, abstain from the urges of the stomach and the private parts, and at night God has made these urges lawful for us. This alleviation only came after there had been self-deception in order to show us God's mercy in how He makes allowances for human nature. 'It has been made permissible for you on the night preceding fasting to approach your wives....' To 'approach' (*rafath*) means to have sexual relations with a woman, whether foreplay or actual intercourse. '... [T]hey are clothing for you and you are clothing for them....'

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to show us how the union of man and woman takes place by the word of God. 'Clothing' is something which is put on the body to cover it, and so it is as though woman is a garment for man and man is a garment for woman and the first function of clothing is to cover one's nakedness. It is as though man is a garment for woman in that he covers her nakedness, and she covers his, and so it is as though this is a reciprocal action. And this happens in reality, for they are entwined in a single cloth, and so God *the Most High* says, '...So now, have relations with them...' means place your skin next to their skin.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to teach us that woman is a garment which covers man and that man is a garment which covers woman; and the

True Lord *the Most High* wants this garment to keep covering so that no part of the spouses is exposed to anyone else. And so the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* warned us that the things which take place between a man and woman at night should not then be divulged to others by the woman or the man by day; and this is part of the cover that each gives the other.

‘... [T]hey are clothing for you and you are clothing for them....’ As long as they are a garment for you and you are a garment for them, this is the mercy of this law for mankind; and man and woman have been wrapped in a single garment, and then asked not to abstain from this connection (during fasting).

God’s words ‘...you used to deceive yourselves...’ refer to a natural and inevitable occurrence which is why the True Lord *the Most High* then says after them, ‘...so He accepted your repentance and forgave you....’ ‘He accepted your repentance’ is an announcement from God that He has granted forgiveness; and when God announces that He has granted forgiveness, this means that He has established repentance for them. As we know, repentance has three stages: first God establishes repentance, secondly you repent, and thirdly God *the Most High* accepts this repentance. Then God says, ‘...and forgave you....’ because as long as He has brought this matter about as a way of highlighting the exaltedness of this law of alleviation, the intention is that it should first take place, and then He *the Exalted* should forgive and remove this hardship.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...So now, have relations with them and seek that which God has decreed for you....’ He did not want to make this permission to lie with them be completely unrestrained, and so He said that when you lie with them, you must remember what God has ordained; and what God has ordained is the protection from sin that comes from this union and relation. The wife seeks to keep her husband chaste so that he does not look at any other woman, and likewise the husband seeks to keep her chaste so that she does not look at anyone else but him. God wants chastity to arise from this matter so that the child that grows from this union will grow up in an environment based firmly on purity and decency.

And so that a man does not have any doubt about his own flesh and blood, his children, the True Lord *the Most High* wants to purify mankind; and so every child must be ascribed to the one who sired it; and after he has his

enjoyment he must bear the consequences. It is not right for a Muslim to have his enjoyment and then leave someone else to bear the consequences of it, but rather, the Muslim lives up to all his responsibilities. ‘...So now, have relations with them and seek that which God has decreed for you...’ that is, what God ordained in that marriage is to preserve chastity and produce children; and this is a means of purifying everyone in society, and this is why the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says, ‘...And for one to have sexual relations is charity.’ Companions exclaimed, ‘O Messenger of God, could one do that which he desires and yet be rewarded for it?’ He answered, ‘Do you see that if he were to indulge it in an unlawful way, would he not thereby be sinful? Likewise, when he indulges it in a lawful way, he is rewarded.’⁽¹⁾

The True Lord *the Most High* then says, ‘...and eat and drink until the white thread becomes distinct to you from the black thread at dawn....’ That is, until the true dawn is clear for you to see. At the time of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* there were two *adhans* (calls for prayers) given for the Dawn Prayer: Bilal *God be pleased with him* would give the call at night, when it was still night-time, and Ibn Umm Maktoum *God be pleased with him* would give the call at the first moment of dawn. And so the Messenger of God *be pleased with him* said, ‘When you hear the *adhan* of Ibn Umm Maktoum, begin the fast,’ but one of the Companions, ‘Adiyy ibn Hatim, said, ‘I keep beside me a white thread and a black one, and I keep eating until I can tell the white from the black.’ He *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, ‘You are slow on the uptake: what is meant here is the whiteness of day and the blackness of night!’

The True Lord *the Most High* then says, ‘...then complete the fast until nightfall. And do not have relations with them as long as you are retired for worship in the mosques; these are the limits set up by God, so do not approach them....’ They understood that to lie with one’s spouse at night as God ordained did not spoil the fast, but there still had to be specified the proper way in which to act whilst in the mosque, or whilst keeping the Prophetic practice of the spiritual vigil (*i’tikaf*) which the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*

(1) Narrated by Muslim, Abu Dawud, and Ahmad.

used to keep in the last ten days of *Ramadan*. Because of this, the True Lord *the Most High* clarifies that the permission for spouses to lie with each other at night is only for the one who is not keeping a spiritual vigil during the nights of *Ramadan*. As for the one keeping vigil in a mosque, this is not permissible for him. The meaning of keeping a spiritual vigil is that you restrict your movements for a period of time to a certain place, and so if they say that so-and-so is keeping vigil during these days, it means that he has restricted his movements for a certain period of time to a certain place. This vigil is not restricted only to the last ten nights of *Ramadan*, but rather, the Muslim can make a vigil in God's house (mosque) at any time.

Scholars differ about spiritual vigils: some say that a condition of the spiritual vigil is that one fasts when he makes it, and also that the vigil lasts a specific period of time, and that it takes place in a mosque. They say that if you want to make a spiritual vigil, you must confine your movements to one place, the house of God.

Many scholars say that whenever you enter a mosque, you can obtain the reward of a spiritual vigil as long as you make the intention that you are making a spiritual vigil according to the Prophetic practice, on condition that you do not speak about any worldly things; for you have left your free actions in the world to come to the house of God at this time; so, make all your concern be focused on God. This is why when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* saw a man in the mosque asking after something he had lost, he said to him: 'May God not return it to you! Mosques were not built for this!'⁽¹⁾

Why? It is because the mosque is a place for worship, and so I say to those who speak to me in the mosque about anything connected with their livelihood: 'Be sure that it will not work.' This is because you enter a mosque for worship alone, and the moment you enter the mosque is a moment when you come to draw close to your Lord and engage in intimate discourse with Him, and to live in the sanctuary of His care; and so why bring your worldly life with you? We should take as our example one of the companions, who

(1) Narrated by Ahmad, Muslim, Abu Dawud, An-Nasa'i, and Ibn Maja.

said, 'We take off worldly matters when we take off our shoes.' And another companion added to this: 'We also leave our ranks alongside our shoes.'

Look at this exactitude. The second companion did not only leave his worldly concerns at the door of the mosque, but he also left his worldly rank. This worldly life might occupy you for many hours of the day, whilst the mosque only takes up a little time, and so leave your rank with your shoes outside the mosque, and enter with no rank except that of your faith in God, and sit wherever you find a free space, and do not step over people's necks to get to a specific place in the mosque. You enter with your servitude before God, and you might take your place alongside the one who serves you, and the young person sits next to the old, and you are afforded no rank save the rank you hold in God's sight.

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* would sit down wherever the gathering dictated, that is, wherever he found a place. This is the opposite of what takes place in our time, when people reserve places for others with prayer-mats, and a person might come in and step over other people in order to sit in the first row, not knowing that God had already decided the rows before he arrived at the mosque. As long as we leave aside our worldly ranks, do not say, 'Where should I sit, and next to whom?' rather, sit wherever you find a place, and do not step over people; and intend to keep a spiritual vigil, and do not speak about any worldly matters so that you do not thereby apply to yourself the supplication of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* that God not give you success in finding the lost thing you seek and ask after.

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* would keep spiritual vigil in the mosque for the last ten nights of *Ramadan*. Does this mean that spiritual vigils can only be offered in mosques? No; a spiritual vigil can be kept in any place, but the spiritual vigil which is offered in a mosque is the more complete form of spiritual vigil because you consider both, the matter of time and space as well.

'...And do not have relations with them as long as you are retired for worship in the mosques; these are the limits set up by God, so do not approach them....' The 'limit' is a barrier which prevents two things from mixing. The limits of God are those things which He prohibits, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said: '... And those who fall into doubtful

matters fall into the unlawful, just like a shepherd who tends his flock near the reserved pasture, and is on the brink of entering it. Every king has his reserved land, and the reserved land of God is all He has prohibited.'⁽¹⁾

So, unlawful things are those things around which God *the Most High* placed a boundary; so, do not transgress it. We can observe that when God forbids something, He *the Exalted* says, 'do not approach them' (*al-Baqara*: 187), and when He issues a command, He *the Exalted* says, 'Do not transgress them' (*al-Baqara*: 229). This is out of God's mercy for us, His servants.

Do not let your wife come to you when you are keeping a spiritual vigil, as she might be beautiful and you might be tempted by her presence. Even if you do not intend to do anything, you should not approach the things which lead to unlawful things. For example, when wine was prohibited, God forbade that we should go near it, i.e. that we even should not approach the places where wine is found; for to approach something might tempt you to try it. So in order to keep yourself from this forbidden thing, you must not even approach it; and in the case of those things which you are commanded to do, you must not transgress them.

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by saying, '...Thus God makes clear His signs to people that they may fear Him.' Signs (*ayat*) are amazing things, and a sign is something amazing which captures the attention. This is why we say in idiomatic Arabic that something is a 'sign of beauty' or a 'sign of radiance.' The word (*aya*) can also mean a mark because a mark or a sign is that which directs us to something. And so everything mentioned in this verse is summed up by God's words: '...Thus God makes clear His signs to people that they may fear Him.'

This verse and the verses before it explained the laws of fasting and the exceptions to these laws which lifted certain interdictions and alleviated certain hardships after they had occurred, and all of this was in order that the law was able to accommodate everything that God asked from those to whom the law was issued. When everyone takes this clear elucidation from his Lord

(1) Narrated by Imam Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nasa'i, and Ibn Maja on the authority of Nu'man ibn Bashir God be pleased with him; it is part of a longer Hadith.

and applies it to his life in light of God's way, he will have shielded himself (become pious/God-fearing). God-fearing, as we know, does not only relate to fear of hell but also to all the other problems of this life. The thing that plagues our lives with problems is that we take the laws we invent ourselves and apply them; but if we were to take God's laws, this would allow us to avoid all these problems. The True Lord *the Most High* says that anyone who turns away from His remembrance shall have a straitened life (*Ta Ha*: 124).

That is, his life will be filled with problems and worries because he disobeys the way of God. If no problems arose because of disobedience, people would say, 'We disobeyed God's way, and we found success!' And so problems were bound to arise in order to alert us to the fact that God's way must prevail in our life. When people hold fast to God's way, these problems will not befall them, by God's leave.

Look at the precision of the Quranic discourse in the way it arranges things one after the other. Mankind, a creature of God living on the earth which is subdued for him along with all that is upon it, has a life which he must preserve. Individual life continues as long as there is provision of sustenance: food and drink; and likewise the human species survives by means of procreation. God *the Most High* spoke about the provision of sustenance, and He declared it to be for all people when He said, 'O mankind, eat from whatever is on earth [that is] lawful and good...' (*al-Baqara*: 168).

And He *the Exalted* then spoke specifically to the believers about this provision: 'O you who believe, eat of the good things which we have provided for you...' (*al-Baqara*: 172).

Then it was God's Will to charge those who believed in Him with certain responsibilities, and He forbade them food, drink, and marital relations during *Ramadan*, all of which are permissible outside of *Ramadan*, and God permitted them during the night in *Ramadan*. If it has been found that the purpose of every action in life is to preserve life, and if food is essential for life, and is something necessary for all people, and if life is extended and passed on by procreation so that a man matures and becomes ready to fertilize and a woman matures and becomes ready to conceive – if all of these aforementioned things are necessary for everyone, then there must be laws to organise all this.

The law allows you to eat what you own, or to eat what has no owner like those plants which grow but are not owned by anyone; but before you eat, you must consider whether the food is of a kind which God has permitted or not. The law does not allow you to eat the plants of the earth which belong to someone else, and it forbids you from hunting animals which belong to someone else; for the law respects the work undertaken by the owner of the land in planting the crops or raising the livestock. So you cannot say, 'This crop is in the ground, and so I will eat it,' or 'this animal is right there before me, and so I will hunt it.'

The True Lord *the Most High* makes laws to regulate actions involving wealth owned by others after He regulates actions involving things which no one owns and food which no one owns. If someone else beats you to some money or some food that no one owns; or if a person does some work and so produces some wealth, there will arise another matter which is not related to the thing consumed itself, but rather with the ownership of the thing consumed. God *the Most High* made it clear that all the actions by which you gain your nourishment are not things which you could do alone, but rather, the work of others must combine with your own; you can only eat from what is in their possession, and they can only eat from what is in your possession.

For example, the farmer sows seeds, but he needs someone to make him the hoe, and the plough, and the irrigation channel; and the one who makes all these things needs someone to teach him how, and get the raw materials for him. And so if you were to follow the chain of events which brought the food to you, you would see that all the motions of the universe play a part in this. So we find that consuming common goods is something known to all mankind and God wants to regulate it with a system, and so He *the Exalted* says:

وَلَا تَأْكُلُوا أَمْوَالَكُمْ بَيْنَكُمْ بِالْبَاطِلِ وَتُدْلُوا بِهَا إِلَى الْحُكَّامِ
لِتَأْكُلُوا فَرِيقًا مِّنْ أَمْوَالِ النَّاسِ بِالْإِثْمِ وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٨٨﴾

Do not consume your property wrongfully, nor use it to bribe judges, intending sinfully and knowingly to consume parts of other people's property [188] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 188)

As long as they are my possessions, why can I not consume them? The command here is issued to everyone, and the possessions are ascribed to everyone;

when a possession belongs to me, it can, at the same time, be something which others can benefit from.

So, it is something shared by all, but what regulates how it is passed around? What regulates how it is passed around is the firm truth which never changes; and wrongfulness cannot regulate it. What is wrongfulness, and what is truth? Wrongfulness is that which passes: it is transient and does not last, and always fades away. The truth is that which is firm and never changes. So do not consume wrongfully, that is, do not consume that which belongs to someone else unless you have a right which God has established with a ruling. So do not steal, and do not usurp, and do not snatch, and do not take bribes, and do not embezzle and betray the trusts with which you are charged; for if any of this takes place, you will have consumed these possessions unjustly.

When you unjustly consume, you cannot personally exempt others from what you have allowed for yourself, and so other people will also consume unjustly so that everyone will plunder everyone else. But when mankind is governed by justice and truth, you will only take rightfully, and everyone else will be obliged only to give to you rightfully, and so all of life's motions will conform to a law organised by the firm truth which never changes. Why? That is because wrongfulness might sometimes be ascendant but does not have any stability. The True Lord *the Most High* says that He sends down water from the sky, and once-dry river-beds are running high according to their measure; the stream carries swelling foam on its surface; and, likewise, from that metal which they melt in the fire in order to make ornaments or utensils, there rises scum. In this way does God set forth the parable of truth and falsehood: for, as far as the scum is concerned, it passes away as does all dross; but that which is of benefit to man abides on earth. In this way does God set forth the parables (*ar-Ra'd*: 17).

When you see rain falling onto a rivulet or valley floor, you find that this rain washes away all the refuse and impurities and carries it off so that it floats on the water and produces foam. Likewise, when you put iron into fire it melts and all the impurities come out of it and float on the surface. And so we find that for something to be on the top and rise to the surface, does not mean that it is truth; God *the Exalted* mentions tangible matters to allow us to derive from them abstract concepts, and so you see that what is wrong might

rise and come to the surface, but it does not remain; it rather ends. The popular phrase has it: 'What goes up must come down.'

God *the Most High* wants our livelihood to be pure, noble, and upright so that nothing enters your stomach unless you have worked for it, and so every person takes what is theirs rightfully. Before a person thinks of eating, he should work so he can eat, not wait for the fruits of other people's labour. Why? It is because this laziness will immerse life in chaos. If we see a person who does not work and yet lives comfortably, eating by means of the efforts of others, this person will become an example which others will imitate, and everyone will thus be tempted to stop working and live by sponging off others. This will bring all of life's productive motions to a halt, and this is a transient wrong, and so all the fruits of labour will cease to be produced, and everyone will go hungry.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants people to work to fulfil their needs for food, drink and shelter so that the cycle of life will continue. He *the Exalted* wants to preserve for us the honour of work in life, meaning that you work for everything you benefit from; for the benefit of your work is not reserved solely for you, but rather, it is part of an ongoing chain of different works, and when you spread the honour of work, everyone will work for this honour. But wrongfulness brings about the opposite of this, for when you consume the fruits of the works of others, you spread chaos throughout existence.

Because of this, lawful work is not only that you work; you must also consider the honour of work by not being on the side of wrong; this is because those who steal are working when they steal, but their work has no honour, and is unlawful. So every stolen item in existence is the fruit of unlawful work, and the same is the case with extortion, fraud, deception, dishonest work, embezzlement, betrayal of trusts, and disavowal. All of this is wrongful, and every work which God has not sanctioned is sinful, and even to aid work which God has not sanctioned is sinful.

The True Lord *the Most High* commands us: 'And do not consume one another's wealth unjustly....' That is, beware of wrongfully consuming and then employing legal artifices so that the authorities absolve you and say that the wrong you have done is actually right. There are many people who see the

actions of an authority figure as an excuse to act just like him; and this is a mistake because everyone is responsible for his own actions.

Do not say that since the ruler has made certain actions permissible, your own actions are his responsibility; the likeness of this is those things which we call ‘fine arts,’ such as dancing, singing, and profligacy: the fact that the authorities have allowed these things rather than banned them – does this make them lawful? No, because there is a difference between civil law and Divine law; and so you find that corruption only becomes widespread in life because of this kind of behaviour.

Those people, who work in professions which God *the Most High* does not sanction, thereby consume their own possessions wrongfully, and they force the produce of wrongful wealth into the bellies of their children. Those who consume these kinds of things should be well aware that the one who supports them is feeding them with unlawful and wrongfully gained produce; and they should be mindful of their Lord, and say, ‘No; we will not eat from this source because it is unlawful and wrong, and we were created by God, and He *the Most High* has undertaken to provide for us our sustenance.’

I, very often, hear people say, ‘These wrongful practices have become a part of life, and our life is built around them so that we cannot do without them.’ I say to them: No; you should rebuild your lives on a lawful basis, and if someone insists on doing unlawful work in order to support their dependants, the dependants should take a stand and refuse it, and insist on not consuming anything wrongfully.

Can you imagine what would happen if a son refused to eat from the proceeds of his mother’s work if she was a dancer or a singer, for example, or from the produce of his father’s work if he knew that he worked in a wrongful profession? It would be very hard on the mother or father themselves.

To those who say, ‘This is our means of sustenance, and we have no other sustenance besides it,’ I say: God *the Most High* provides sustenance for those whom He wills beyond all reckoning, and no one should think that his work is what brings him sustenance; rather, God provides him with sustenance by means of this work. If he moves from a wrongful job to another job which is

lawful, God will not begrudge him a righteous job and a righteous means of sustenance to support him.

The True Lord *the Most High* explained this matter when He wanted to forbid the idolaters from entering God's Mosque in Mecca. There were people who made their living from what the idolaters would spend in the pilgrimage season, and during this economic season the inhabitants of Mecca would sell all kinds of things to the idolaters who came to the House. If God made it forbidden for the idolater to go to the Sacred Mosque, what were these people to do?

The first thing that comes to mind is the thought, 'How would they live?' Let us reflect on the matter which God *the Most High* wanted to establish in the soul of every believer. The True Lord *the Most High* addresses the believers saying that idolaters are indeed impure, and they should not approach the Sacred Mosque after that year (*at-Tawba*: 28).

And then He addresses the matter which would come to the minds of people, telling the believers that should they fear poverty, then God will give them wealth from His bounty if He so wills (*at-Tawba*: 28). So we see that this matter was not hidden from God. So no one should say: 'This wrongful and unlawful work is the source of my sustenance, and I will not be able to live if I leave it,' whether the job is to compose music, or to play a musical instrument, or to write profligate songs, or to dance, or to sculpt statues. We say to him: No; do not make this your source of livelihood when God *the Most High* tells you that should you fear poverty, then God will give you wealth from His bounty. If you have fear of God, He *the Exalted* will make for you a way out and provide for you from whence you had not expected (*at-Talaq*: 2-3). You need to quit every job which entails disobedience to God, and look to the hand which God stretches out to you bearing His favours.

So God's words: 'And do not consume one another's wealth unjustly...' are a caution to people not to feed themselves and their dependents on anything but rightfully-gained wealth, wealth earned by noble, wholesome work, and that the support of the believer should always be the word of the True Lord *the Most High* that whoever has fear of God, God will make for him a way out and provide for him from whence he has not expected (*at-Talaq*: 2-3).

We should also know that one who consumes what is unlawful, will be denied what is rightful; meaning that God *the Most High* would try him with an illness which would prevent him from eating what is good and lawful. You can find a person who possesses much wealth, and can afford to consume any kind of food and drink, but the doctors forbid him from eating all kinds of food because to eat them would be dangerous and harmful to his health. So the blessing is there before him, and belongs to him, but he cannot eat it rightfully; and at the same time, this blessing is enjoyed by his children and his servants, and his entourage, and everyone he supports. To a person such as this, we say: You must have taken something wrongfully that God has denied you what is rightful.

This is why we say: He who consumes what is wrongful will be denied what is rightful; and likewise we say: If someone uses something as a means to do what is wrongful, God *the Most High* will show him the ruin of it rightfully, so, if someone wrongs the people using his power and his strong muscles, there will surely come a day when he becomes weak.

And the woman who shakes her waist elegantly will surely find a day when her waist stiffens so that she cannot move it; and the one who dazzles people with her beautiful eyes from right to left will surely find a day when she goes blind and so cannot see anyone, and the people are revolted by her ugliness.

So, everyone who consumes unjustly will be denied what is rightful; and everyone who uses something as a means to do what is wrongful, God *the Most High* will show him the ruin of it rightfully. Make a list of all the people you know, and review the life of all those who use what God *the Most High* has created to spread perversion, or make it a means to do something wrongful: God *the Most High* will surely make them see the wrongfulness of this.

I want people to make a list of all those who deviate from God's way, and reflect on the outcome of their lives. Each one of us knows his neighbours and colleagues: what is the source of what they consume? How do they earn their livings? Let him reflect on their lives, and thereby recognise what is lawful work and what is unlawful work, and make their lives a lesson for himself and for his children. How did they live? How did they turn out? And then he should look at how these people ended their lives.

Out of our love for these people, we say to them: Change your ways, for you cannot deceive God about how you are gathering unlawful wealth by then giving some of it as charity; God *the Most High* will not accept this act of yours because God is good, and He only accepts that which is good.

We hear about many deviant people going to perform the pilgrimage, and building mosques, and giving charity, all of which with money they unlawfully earned. To such people, we say: God *the Most High* has no need of your worship, and your unlawful charity; and we advise them that God does not require you to build mosques for him with unlawful funds, or to give charity to His servants with money which is unlawfully earned. Rather, He *the Exalted* wants you to be true to His Way.

If we reflect on the verse, we find something amazing about it. God *the Most High* says, 'And do not consume one another's wealth unjustly or present it to rulers....' The True Lord *the Most High* mentions rulers in the verse because the ruler is the one who makes laws, and can give legitimacy to money even if it was amassed wrongfully. God's word 'present' (*tudlu*) is derived from the Arabic verb *adla*, which means to lower a pail on a rope down a well; the verb *dallah* means to raise the pail from the well, whilst the verb *adla* means to lower it. And the word is used in the story of Satan's temptation of mankind, the True Lord *the Most High* says that Satan led them (Adam and his wife) on (*dallahuma*) with deluding thoughts. But as soon as the two had tasted the fruit of the tree, they became conscious of their nakedness (*al-A'raf*: 22).

God's words '...or present it to rulers...' means to bribe the judges in order to consume some of the possessions of others unlawfully. It is amazing that this very verse is a clear text about bribery. The Arabic word for bribery is *rashwa* which is derived from *risha'* which is the word for the rope which the pail is tied to so that the verb *adla* and *dalla* are connected to the concept of bribery. Why do they use their wealth to bribe the judges? They do it so that the judges will give them legal edicts allowing them to wrongfully consume the possessions of others. This is how it is when we are governed by man-made laws; yet, when we are governed by the laws of God, the judge will not allow this kind of thing.

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* established this principle by saying: ‘I am but a human being, and antagonists in disputes come to me; and it may be that one of you is more eloquent than the other, and I might consider him right and judge in his favour because of that. So if I give what is the right of one Muslim to another, it is but a piece of hellfire – he may take it or leave it.’⁽¹⁾ The one who said this is the infallible Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and he is warning against anyone trying to use eloquent arguments in order to take something which is not rightfully his.

So, when corruption becomes law, this is a result of the ruler having sanctioned it, and people then taking the ruler’s decision as final. An example of this is: some rulers did not ban usury, and so people engaged in it with the excuse that since governments allow it, there is no harm in it. This kind of understanding is not correct because no government can allow what God has forbidden; and if they do so, the believer should be cautious and know that both he and the rulers are governed by Divine Law; and if governments do not judge according to what is lawful because they seek to preserve their temporal power, the believer still must not stray from the teachings of his religion.

If we consider any corruption in the world, whatever form it may take, we will find that the reason for it is the wrongful consumption of wealth. And so the True Lord *the Most High* did not allow these matters to be muted, but rather, He made them manifest in things which could be readily observed. If you want to know the people of any era, with respect to their religious observance and the honesty of their dealings, look at the architecture of any era. Look at the buildings, and through them, you will be able to gauge the morals of the era. If you look at the process of building now, you will find therein misuse of funds, untrustworthy contractors, and duplicity amongst the workers. We can see all of these things in architecture. Let us consider, for example, the At-Tahrir compound, and let us think back to the time when it was built; and then let us compare it with the postal authorities building or the Supreme Court, and the other buildings constructed at the same time as them.

Let us consider the buildings and structures which we hear about, which collapse over their inhabitants; and then let us compare them with the postal

(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari*

authorities building or the Supreme Court. We will find that the old buildings were established with safety and security; as for the buildings which collapse over their inhabitants in our times, or whose sewage pipes are damaged, they were established by the fraudulence of the voraciously greedy contractor, and the swindling architect who designed or supervised the building, or who supervised the building and vouched for its soundness, and the deceitful builders who worked on it. The result of this is the loss of innocent people who have done nothing wrong: the building collapses upon them and they end up as dead bodies pulled out of the rubble. The poet Ahmad Shawqi looked at this matter, and he saw that morals and religious spirit were priorities in life:

The building of a people cannot thrive

If their morals are in ruins.

I suggest to the state that they make a permanent record of every building which is constructed, and keep in this record the name of its contractor, and the architect who supervised its construction, and the names of all the builders who worked on it, and the ones who kept the accounts, and the ones who installed the plumbing and electricity, and all those who worked on its construction. All this should be kept in a special file for each building, and if something happens they should go to these people, each according to his specialisation, and hold them to account for their negligent work. If not, people's lives will be lost in vain. Every one of us has a chance in this life, and he must not usurp the chance of anyone else.

Suppose we take our goods be waiting in a queue so that no one could take anyone else's turn, and the first one in the queue comes at seven o'clock in the morning to take his turn, while another comes later after sleeping, and relaxing, and doing everything he needs to do, and then goes to the association and finds that the queue is very long; and so he bribes someone to let him cut into the queue in exchange for some money to help him get his things. This person has violated the rights of everyone else in the queue.

He might say, 'But I took the same thing they did.' We say to him: No; you took the time that belonged to someone else; the last person cannot come along and take the right of the person who had been standing in line since seven o'clock

in the morning. Your right is connected to your time, and so do not infringe upon the time of the others who have less power or money than you do.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘And do not consume one another's wealth unjustly or present it to rulers in order that you consume a portion of the wealth of other people in sin, while you know.’ A portion is an amount taken from a given larger amount so that if a small amount is taken from people, this amount is termed a ‘portion.’

The essence of sin – even if there were no religion – is doing something for which one is blamed and censured; and likewise, you are also blamed and censured for it by the religion, and on top of that you are punished in the Hereafter. What is the criterion of right and wrong? The criterion which saves you from wrong is that you accept for yourself the same you would expect from others in any deal or transaction because you only like for yourself those things in which you see benefit for yourself.

The True Lord *the Most High* then throws light on a matter which concerns something that the Islamic mission was faced with. The Islamic mission only came to take those who believed in God from a situation in life which was largely, if not totally, wrong, but which they had become accustomed and used to, for some people had benefitted from this wrong; and falsehood does not last unless there are those who benefit from it. Islam came to rid people of these wrongful things. The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to inform us that not everything people used to do before is completely evil, but rather, there were certain things which Islam accepted as they were. Islam did not change things simply for the sake of change, but rather, it confronted the harmful things in life which only wrongdoers benefitted from.

For example, the standard practice for blood indemnities was that one hundred camels would be paid by the murderer's family; and Islam left this as it was. When the Muslims accepted faith in God, they thereby accepted all of His laws, and they wanted to base their lives on a new, pure, Islamic system. They would even ask for rulings concerning those things which they used to do in the times of pagan ignorance because they did not want to do them in the customary way they were done, but rather they wanted to draw near to God with obedience. So they looked forward to shouldering their religious

responsibilities, and they knew that God would only charge them with those things which were to their benefit. Whenever you read the words 'They ask you' in the Quran, know that it refers to something of this nature.

For example, He *the Exalted* says the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* will be asked by his companions as to what they should spend in God's Way. He was commanded to say, 'Whatever you can spare' (*al-Baqara*: 219). And He *the Exalted* says that he *peace and blessings be upon him* will be asked about menses. He was commanded to say that it is a vulnerable condition (*al-Baqara*: 222). And He *the Exalted* says that he will be asked how to deal with orphans (*al-Baqara*: 219). And He *the Exalted* says that they will ask him *peace and blessings be upon him* as to what they should spend on others. He was commanded to say, 'whatever of your wealth you spend shall [first] be for your parents, and for the near of kin' (*al-Baqara*: 215). And He *the Exalted* says that they will ask him *peace and blessings be upon him* about Dhul Qarnain (*al-Kahf*: 83). And He *the Exalted* says that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* will be asked about the spoils of war, and he *peace and blessings be upon him* was commanded to say that all spoils of war belong to God and the Messenger (*al-Anfal*: 1).

So, every question meant that they wanted to base their lives on an Islamic system, and even in the cases of those things which Islam did not change, they wanted to know them and do them as Islamic rulings, not simply as matters of custom.

The question which we will be examining next concerns a natural phenomenon. When the Muslims asked about a natural phenomenon, this shows that they looked to God's creation with another kind of religious outlook. They found the sun rising every day without changing; but the moon which rises at night does change: it begins the month small, and then gets bigger until it is full, and then it begins to get smaller again until it becomes like it was. They noticed what happens to the moon and yet, does not happen to the sun, and so they asked the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. Or, the case might be that some Jews wanted to embarrass the Muslims, and so they said to them, 'Ask your Messenger about the new moon: How does it start off small and then grow until it is full, and then repeat the same cycle again until there are

two nights in which we cannot see it at all?’ The Quran recorded this question when God *the Most High* said:

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْأَهِلَّةِ ۖ قُلْ هِيَ مَوَاقِيتُ لِلنَّاسِ وَالْحَجِّ وَلَيْسَ الْبِرُّ
بِأَنْ تَأْتُوا الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهَا وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنِ اتَّقَىٰ وَأَتُوا
الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ أَبْوَابِهَا وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿١٨٩﴾

**They ask you [Prophet] about crescent moons. Say,
‘They show the times appointed for people, and for the
pilgrimage.’ Goodness does not consist of entering houses by
the back [door]; the truly good person is the one who is
mindful of God. So enter your houses by their [main] doors
and be mindful of God so that you may prosper [189]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 189)**

The word *ahilla* (‘new moons’) is the plural of *hilal* (‘new moon’). It is called *hilal* because when a person sees it, he ‘hails,’ that is he utters *tahlil* (‘glorification of God’), meaning he raises his voice and extols God. In this verse, the True Lord *the Most High* gives an answer which gives the details of the moon, which is the celestial body which subjected to the curiosity of the human mind to discover its reality. The ancient Arabs did not know much about this moon; they would use it to tell the dates, and their knowledge of it did not go beyond the limits of the benefit they gained from it, and they did not have the intellectual opulence by which they could reflect on the signs of God in the universe. Every sign of the universe is first benefited from, and after that it spurs the mind to discover its reality; and it might not spur the mind, but in this case, the benefit remains as it is.

The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to alert us to an important principle, which was to teach us how to benefit from natural signs such as the moon. It is not enough just that it appears and disappears, and changes size because the mind cannot comprehend this; rather, we benefit from it as a marker of time, and we use it to measure the passage of time. If, now in the twentieth century, scientists have still not found satisfactory explanations for all the phenomena of the moon, what can we say about those who asked about it fourteen centuries ago?

Modern scientists explain, for example, that the sun is one-and-a-quarter million times bigger than the earth, and the moon is smaller than the earth; and when the earth comes between the sun and the moon, despite the massiveness of the sun the earth covers part of the moon, and this covered part accords with the covered arc of the earth so that this part of the moon becomes dark.

The existence of the moon is confirmed, but when the earth is between it and the sun, it shades it from the sun's light, and the size of its light increases as the earth moves away from it. When the earth moves completely out of the way, the moon appears in the sky as a full moon, after which the earth once again shades it from part of the sun, and this increases day after day, and the sunlight which reflects from the moon is cut off as a result so that it gradually becomes smaller until the earth comes between it and the sun so that none of it is visible. We say that when we cannot see the moon by night or day even though it still exists in its place, this means that it is covered by the shadow of the earth, and this is why we cannot see it. This does not happen to the sun because the sun is extremely big; and when it does happen, its effect is slight – it is called a 'solar eclipse.'

When the Arabs looked at the universe, they said, 'What is it about the new moon that makes it come like this, and then grow until it is full?' The True Lord *the Most High* said, '...say, "They are measurements of time for the people and for pilgrimage...."' They were asking about new moons and their cycles, but God cut short this line of thinking of theirs and gave them the essence and the most important significance from which they can benefit, and said, '...say, "They are measurements of time for the people and for pilgrimage...."' This was all the minds of the time could understand; as for the rest of the matter, you should wait until the time comes for it to be discovered; and your ignorance of it does not prevent you from benefiting from it.

The answer to any question at that time would be commensurate with the capabilities of the minds of time to grasp; as for the other answers, God *the Most High* left them for the right time. He does not tell us anything except that which imparts unto us a ruling. For example, in the past they said that the earth was spherical, and then science confirmed that this was indeed the case, and we saw it for ourselves by use of satellites, and that was that.

When the Arabs asked about the new moons, the True Lord *the Most High* told us that they were an indication of periods *mawaqit* (plural of *miqat*), which is derived from the word *waqt*, meaning ‘time.’ We know that every action requires a time and a place, and so time and place are linked to action, and there can be no time and place without there also being an action.

If someone says, ‘What was time like before God created all creation?’ we say to him: Time was made for finite beings, namely created beings, whilst God is infinite. Since God is infinite and not finite, there is neither time nor place, so, do not ask ‘when?’ or ‘where?’ because ‘when’ and ‘where’ are created beings. How do we define time? We define time by saying that a period of time is a period in which a given event or action takes place. What does place have to do with this definition? Time sometimes determines place so that time is the basis and place is incidental to it; on other occasions, place is the basis and time is incidental to it; and on a third kind of occasion, both time and place are essential.

Here in Egypt, if we want to perform the pilgrimage, we enter into the state of ritual consecration (*ihram*) when we reach the place called Rabigh, and we call Rabigh ‘the *miqat* of the Egyptians,’ i.e. the place where no one going to perform pilgrimage passes without first entering into ritual consecration. So, the word *miqat* can also refer to places, such as Rabigh, and as soon as an Egyptian on the way to the pilgrimage gets to Rabigh, he enters into ritual consecration, whether the time is morning, noon, afternoon, or evening.

But when we begin fasting, time is the basis for your fast wherever you may go. Time is what determines the occasion of fasting, whether you are in TanTa, or London, or Tokyo; and so we see how time can also be a *miqat*.

So, sometimes, time is the determinant of a *miqat*, whilst place is incidental to it, and sometimes, it is place which determines the *miqat*, whilst time is incidental to it, and sometimes both time and place determine the action such as is the case with the *Day of 'Arafa* during pilgrimage.

This is how we know the meaning of ‘...measurements (*mawaqit*) of time for the people....’ By the new moon, we know that the month of *Ramadan* has begun, and we know when the festival of *'Eid Al-Fitr* has begun, and likewise the season of the pilgrimage, and a woman’s waiting-period between

marriages, and the sacred months. We know all of these things by their appropriate periods of time, and the True Lord *the Most High* decreed that the new moon would be the means for us to determine these things; and He decreed that the sun would only determine days for us, although it does have another function in that it determines the zodiacs which are connected to weather conditions and the agricultural cycle. Therefore, He *the Exalted* said that it was He who has made the sun a source of radiant light and the moon a light reflected (*Yunus*: 5).

Look at the precise language used here, and how the True Lord *the Most High* explains to people the nature of reflected light (*nur*) and radiant light (*diya'*). The sun produces its own light, whilst the moon only reflects light because its light comes from a source other than itself. It is like a piece of bright stone upon which the rays of the sun are reflected, thus giving it light. The moon shines with light which comes from something other than it, and so the True Lord *the Most High* says in another verse that He has placed in the sky a radiant lamp and a light-giving moon (*al-Furqan*: 61).

The radiant lamp in this verse means the sun, which gives off heat, and to which the True Lord *the Most High* has allotted zodiac segments (called *buruj* (towers) in Arabic); as for the moon, it has phases, and it gives off the light which comes from something other than it. On the same theme, the True Lord *the Most High* says that it is He 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).

So, the computation and measuring of years comes from the moon, and in our times when they want to measure the passage of time precisely, they base this on the moon because they have found that measuring by the moon is more accurate than measuring by the sun because measurements based on the sun lose a day every few years.

Let us understand the difference between the phases of the moon and the zodiac segments (*buruj*) of the sun. The zodiac segments are names taken (in Arabic) from the Syriac language. These are: Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Virgo, Leo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, and Pisces. There are twelve zodiac segments, and these represent the twelve stages of the sun. They are

connected to the agricultural seasons, and weather and climate. We must understand that God has secret wisdoms connected to the zodiac which is indicated by the fact that the True Lord *the Most High* made them into an oath when He swore by the sky that has *buruj* (constellations/stars/towers) (*al-Buruj*: 1).

And so you find that solar time never changes so that the same months come at the same seasons of year every year. There is a difference of twelve days between the solar year and the lunar year, and the lunar calendar is the one we use to date the Arabic months; and we know the beginning of each month by the new moon. God *the Most High* states that the number of months with God is twelve months (*at-Tawba*: 36).

And so religious responsibilities are determined by the moon so that the phases of the moon would travel through the zodiac signs of the sun, which mean that the religious duty comes in every kind of weather which occurs throughout the year, and therefore you do not always fast *Ramadan* in summer, or always in winter, but rather, God distributes the periods of worship throughout the days of the year. For those who live in cold regions, for example: if the pilgrimage was always in summer, they would not be able to fulfil the obligation; but the season of the pilgrimage rotates through all the months, and so when the pilgrimage occurs in winter it will be easier for them to fulfil the obligation in an atmosphere which is closer to that of their own habitat.

In this way we find that God's wisdom has willed that the periods of worship rotate through every day of the year so that all people, regardless of the climate in which they live, are able to perform their worship without difficulty. So the lunar cycle is distributed through the solar cycle, which is why some of the scholars say that the Night of Power is always passing through each night of the year, considering the passing of the lunar cycle through the solar cycle.

The sun has its zodiac cycle, and the moon has its phases, and the stars have their positions; and God *the Most High* states that it needs not that He swears by the position of the stars, and indeed it is a most solemn oath, if but people know (*al-Waqi'a*: 75-76).

Perhaps a time will come when God *the Most High* will reveal to mankind the effect of the positions of the stars on the lives of man and this will happen

when souls are ready for it, and minds are able to comprehend it. So everything in the universe has a system: the sun has its zodiac cycle, and the moon has its phases, and the stars have their positions. All of the secrets of the universe and its laws and systems are present in these created beings. God has imparted to us one of the secrets of the new moons, which is that they indicate periods for various doings of mankind, including the pilgrimage. When God *the Most High* spoke about the pilgrimage, He wanted to give us a ruling concerning it. There were certain Arab tribes known as 'zealots', and those zealots were particularly enthusiastic about their religion. They included Quraysh, Kinana, Khath'am, Jashm, and Banu Sa'sa' ibn 'Amir. If a member of one of these tribes performed the pilgrimage, he would not enter his house from the front door upon returning because he would be dirty and dishevelled after performing the rites of the pilgrimage. He would try and enter his house in an unusual way, and so he would enter from the back. This was an act of extremism on their part, and God did not want to sanction it so that they would not find their wives, or their families doing something they would not like. When God *the Most High* mentioned the rites of the pilgrimage in the Quran, He wanted to cleanse the rites from these customs which the Arabs had adopted, and so He said, '...and it is not righteousness to enter houses from the rear, but righteousness is in having fear of God; and enter houses by their doors. And fear God that you may succeed.' That is, do not take things superficially and focus on formalities, for We want the essence of piety, that which is good and beneficial.

Notice that the word 'righteousness' here in this verse is in the Arabic nominative case because its grammatical function is to be the subject of the verb *laysa* ('it is not'). In this regard it differs from the word 'righteousness' mentioned previously in God's words: 'Righteousness is not that you turn your faces towards the east or the west...' (*al-Baqara*: 177), where the word 'righteousness' in this sentence is in the Arabic accusative case because its grammatical function here is to be the predicate of the verb *laysa* which here is mentioned before the subject (in Arabic this is known as *khavar muqaddam* ('forwarded predicate')). Some orientalists have tried to criticise the Noble Quran because of this difference in the nominative and accusative cases. We say to them: You do not have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the

Arabic language, so, what can we do for you? It can be correct to mention the predicate first. We say, 'Zaid is hard-working;' this is the case if we know who Zaid is, but we have yet to learn his attribute, and so 'Zaid' is the subject of the sentence and 'hard-working' is the predicate. But if we know that there is someone who is hard-working, but we do not know who that person is, we say: 'The hard-working one is Zaid.'

Sometimes the name is known to you, and so you follow it with the attribute, whilst other times the name is unknown and the attribute is known, in which case you follow the attribute with the name. This is the secret of the difference in the nominative and accusative cases of the word 'righteousness' in these two verses. We say to the orientalist: Every word in the Quran has its proper place and meaning, and so do not treat the Quran ignorantly and then, raise issues which do not detract anything from the value of the Book, but rather serve only to expose your own ignorance.

What does 'righteousness' mean? We said that righteousness is something good and beneficial; and had God *the Most High* left us to define what 'righteousness' is, each of our abilities to understand what is good and beneficial would have been different according to our different minds: You see this as being 'good', whilst another person sees something else, and a third person sees the opposite of what you see. And so God *the Most High* did not leave it to us to give the definition of what righteousness means, and He *the Exalted* determined for us those things which are good and beneficial. No one ever deviates and inclines towards something unless he believes it to be good and beneficial, and so the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...but righteousness is in having fear of God; and enter houses by their doors....'

This indicates to us that every goal has a path which leads to it, so, you should go to the goal via the path which leads to it. The verse then continues with what God wants to say about piety: '...And fear God that you may succeed.' God-fearing is still the major theme of this chapter and every ruling that is explained in it is followed by its reason for being legislated, which is having fear of God.

We know that the meaning of God-fearing is to protect oneself from the perils and problems of life by adhering to God's way. When you see God's

way and you follow it, you protect yourself from these problems; as for those who reject God-fearing, the True Lord *the Most High* describes their destiny saying that whoever turns away from the remembrance of God will indeed have a depressed life (*Ta Ha*: 124).

No one should think that God-fearing merely means to fear hellfire; no; it is broader than that; it is to fear all the problems and dangers that come from contravening God's way. A person should know that for every sin he commits, a day will surely come when these sins are done to him just as he did them to others; and so he who would not like to be sinned against should not sin against others.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* brings up another issue that gives the Islamic community a unique distinction; for He *the Exalted* brought this community into existence and made it naturally disposed to an upright way which none of the other communities before it attained. This distinction is that God *the Most High* charged the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the responsibility of chastising those who stray from God's way. In the past, heaven would chastise those who strayed from the way; the Messenger would explain and deliver the way, and if the people contravened it, Heaven would intervene and punish them, either with a thunderbolt, or with torment, or with a flood, or by some other means. The messengers themselves were not responsible for forcing and coercing the people to follow the way of the religion. When the children of Israel asked their Lord for permission to fight, they were not fighting for the sake of the religion, as the noble verse shows; rather, they asked for permission to fight in God's Cause because they and their children had been driven from their homelands (*al-Baqara*: 246).

So, the reason for fighting was that they had been driven from their homes and forced to leave their children; when they asked for permission to fight they did do not so in order to defend their beliefs, but rather because they and their children had been driven out of their homes.

As for the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, God has charged them with the responsibility of bearing the standard in their hands; and this was not a standard of reign by force, but rather, a standard which protected the dignity of man by preserving for him the freedom to choose using the mind God gave him, for there can be no compulsion to belief in

God. God *the Most High* gave permission to the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to fight, not in order to force upon people His religion, but to preserve for you the freedom to choose the religion which you are satisfied with, and to prevent the forces of tyranny which come between you and your freedom to choose to accept your religious responsibilities.

And so to those who try to accuse Islam of having been ‘spread by the sword,’ we say: Your argument is feeble and false. Likewise, concerning their assertion that Islam imposed the non-Muslim poll-tax (*jizya*) simply in order to raise money, we say: Who was this poll-tax imposed upon? It was imposed upon non-believers. As long as they had a tax imposed upon them, this means that they were allowed to be non-believers. If Islam forced people to accept the religion, there would be no one to take the poll-tax from. Islam did not force anyone, but rather, it protected them from the forces that attempted to dominate them so that , no one could force them to leave their religion, after which they were free to decide whether to accept Islam or not. It is as though those who criticise Islam defend it at the same time so that their own arrow comes right back at them.

Here, a question might arise: If this is the case, why did the Muslims ever fight wars? We say that the wars of Islam were fought to counter those who forced false beliefs onto others, and Islam came to say to these tyrants: Take your hands off the people, and give them freedom to choose the religion they want. Why did Islam leave them free? As it was sure that as long as a person is free to choose, it is not possible that he will find the plain Truth anywhere else but in Islam. And so many of those who read God’s words that there shall be no coercion in faith (*al-Baqara*: 256), do not realise that the reason for this is plain in God’s words in the very same verse declaring that the right way has become clearly distinct from the way of error (*al-Baqara*: 256). So the matter is clear: why would people need to be coerced when Truth and falsehood are plainly laid before them? All that we do is to prevent those who try to impose their false beliefs on people. You can coerce the outer shell of a person, but you can never coerce his heart; and we want faith to be followed by the heart. And so the True Lord *the Most High* comforted our master the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* saying that perhaps he was wearing himself away with grief because they (the Prophet’s people) would not believe; He *the Exalted* further states that if He had so willed, He could have sent down unto the

disbelievers a sign from the skies so that , their necks would (be forced to) bow down before it in humility (*ash-Shu'ara*: 3-4).

God *the Most High* does not want to force necks into submission; Had He wanted that, no one would have been able to escape His decree; for if God wants to try someone with sickness or death, no one can escape His decree. The True Lord *the Most High* wants faithful hearts not coerced shells. If someone wants to force others to believe by using a whip, no one will follow him, and he himself will not truly believe in what he forces upon others. If he truly believed in it, he would not violently force it upon others; and so they would kill him off freely and willingly as soon as they realised that this was the right way to preserve their lives.

When we look around ourselves, we find that the regimes and governments which force their principles by violence and compulsion end up collapsing one after the other, for when these governments stop using violence and tyranny the people abandon these ideas. Here, the Quran deals with this issue when it speaks about fighting and legislates fighting, that thing with which God distinguished the Islamic community; and He *the Exalted* did not permit fighting during the Meccan period of the Islamic mission which lasted thirteen years, allowing it only after the emigration to Medina. It was necessary that the option of fighting be delayed because the True Lord *the Most High* first wanted the Muslims to take care of following His way so that they could be a model for others, and so others could see in them a good example; this is why the True Lord *the Most High* commanded the believers to forgive and forbear, until God shall make manifest His will (*al-Baqara*: 109). And He *the Exalted* also commanded His Messenger not to obey the infidels and the hypocrites, and yet to refrain from hurting them (*al-Ahzab*: 48).

Why this gradual progression? It was because the True Lord *the Most High* knew that the call to Islam would enter the Arab households so that a single household would contain both, those who disbelieved in God and those who believed in God. Had God *the Most High* permitted fighting from the beginning, there would have been battles in every household.

Moreover, the True Lord *the Most High* knew that these Arab tribes were full of weak-mindedness, recklessness and carelessness, and that they would fight for the most trivial of reasons; because Kulaib, a tribal chief, fired an

arrow at a she-camel and hit it in the udder and killed it, a war erupted which lasted forty years.⁽¹⁾ In this regard, a poet said about rancour and anger:

There are people who, if evil bares its teeth at them,

Fly towards it, in groups and individually.

And another says:

They do not ask their brother, when he calls upon them

In times of hardship what proof he has.

That is, they do not ask their brother, ‘Why are we fighting?’ They fight for any reason and for no reason, and wild fervour often pushes them to fight for no reason. On the other hand, ancient Arabs also had a great sense of justice so that if they saw someone wronging someone else, they would be moved by this sense of justice and would fall upon the wrongdoer. The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to kindle in them this fidelity when they saw the weak Muslims being oppressed; a party of the tribe of Quraysh had confined them to the quarter of Abu Talib, where they were subjected to an embargo and famine. This lasted until the five leading men of Mecca gathered and said, ‘How can we be content to eat and drink and have relations with our women, when the Sons of Hashim and the sons of Muttalib are blockaded in the valley unable to eat, drink, or trade?’

They were unbelievers, but despite this, they took a mighty stance and said, ‘Bring forth the paper on which we pledged to cut off the Sons of Hashim and the Sons of Muttalib so that we can tear it up,’ and they agreed on this. They were five of the leaders of Mecca, namely: Hisham ibn ‘Amr, Zuhair ibn Abu ‘Umayya, Abu Al-Buhturi ibn Hashim, Zam‘a ibn Al-Aswad, and al-Mut‘am ibn ‘Adiyy, and they were the leaders of the fidelity to justice which ended the embargo upon the Muslims. So we see that the Arabs were characterised by wild fervour offset by strong fidelity to justice.

(1) The Basous War was a conflict between two rival clans in medieval Arabia. The Taghlib and Bakr tribes fought for roughly forty years (from 494 to 534 CE), locked in a perpetual cycle of vengeance. In parts of the Arab World today, the Basous War has been incorporated into an aphorism warning people against vendettas.

The True Lord *the Most High* knew that for the Arab nation to move away from what they had grown accustomed to would not be easy on them, and so He handled them with leniency. Some say, 'Why did the Muslims not fight their enemies in Mecca from the first moment, and why did they not slay the leaders of disbelief in Mecca?'

We say to them: Many of the people whom you would have seen it proper to fight at the beginning of the Islamic mission went on to become those who carried forth the banner of Islam after that. An example of this is Khalid ibn A-Walid *God be pleased with him* who was a brave commander of the idolaters' army, and who fought against the Muslims early in his life; and then, God *the Most High* guided him to Islam, and he became known as 'God's unsheathed sword.' What if this great commander had been killed by the Muslims? This would have resulted in the Muslims being deprived of his talents which proved decisive in most of the Islamic conquests in Syria and Iraq.

So, God's wisdom decreed to preserve the likes of Khalid, though they were the enemies of Islam at the beginning of the mission because God *the Most High* prepared a role for them by which they would serve Islam; and so those who first waged war against Islam would maintain the ardour which would lead them to do things by which God *the Most High* would forgive them for what they did before.

Consider 'Ikrima ibn Abu Jahl *God be pleased with him*, who was a thorn in the side of the Muslims at the onset of the mission, and then embraced Islam and did extremely well in serving it; when he was injured at the Battle of Yarmouk and his spirit was close to returning to its Creator, he looked to his commander, Khalid ibn Al-Walid *God be pleased with him*, and said, 'Is this a death which would make the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* pleased with me?' It was as though he knew that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had been angry at him before he embraced Islam.

'Amr ibn Al-'As *God be pleased with him* was the sagacious and resourceful statesman of the Muslims, without whom Egypt would not have been opened to Islam; for by his sagacity, he won over the Egyptians so that they refused to fight him, and he debated with them after that until their hatred for the Muslims died away, and he told them how the Messenger of God *peace and*

peace and blessings be upon him had spoken well of them, saying, ‘Treat the Copts kindly for they have (with us) ties of kinship and safekeeping.’ Moreover, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* had also sent him to some of the Arabs to consolidate their allegiance to Islam. So, out of His mercy, God *the Most High* did not legislate fighting right from the start; otherwise we would have lost many of the great leaders of Islam who carried the banner of the Islamic mission later on. Everyone who was drawn to Islam after having been a foe and an enemy to it, God *the Most High* destined that after he embraced Islam he would play a role by which he served the final religion.

In this way we understand the wisdom of delaying permission to fight in Islam because God *the Most High* wanted to test and examine people, and He wanted that no one enter this religion but those who were ready to bear the hardships and trials that came with it because they would be responsible for the honour of a community, and the way of Heaven, and not just any person can undertake these kinds of things.

It would have been possible that God *the Most High* give victory to His religion right from the start without the Muslims playing any part in it, and this would have meant that all people would have been equal in their faith from the first to the last of them. But His wisdom decided to make for this religion, men who would sacrifice their lives and their possessions to attain martyrdom and rise to the level of the prophets. And so the command to fight was delayed and was given gradually; and the first stage of the command to fight came with God’s words:

وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعَدُوا
إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ ﴿١٩٠﴾

Fight in God’s cause against those who fight you, but do not overstep the limits: God does not love those who overstep the limits [190] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 190)

The circumstance behind the revelation of this verse was that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and his companions yearned to visit the Sacred Mosque, and they wanted to perform the ‘*umra* (lesser pilgrimage),

and so in the month of *Dhu Al-Qi'da* in the sixth year of the *Hijra* they went, intending to perform the 'umra. But when they went and got as far as a place called Al-Hudaybiya, Quraysh confronted them and said, 'Muhammad and his companions cannot enter Mecca.'

Negotiations were held between the two parties, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* agreed to return home that year on the proviso that he could return the following year, when they would be given three days from the month of *Dhu Al-Qi'da* to spend undisturbed in Mecca.

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had given his Companions glad tidings that they would enter the Sacred Mosque with shaved or shorn heads, and this news had spread around, and the Muslims rejoiced and were glad with it; and then they were shocked by the negotiations of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and his agreeing to return when they were only around twenty kilometres shy of Mecca, and so the Companions were saddened. 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *God be pleased with him* was overwhelmed with anger and said to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, 'Are you not the Messenger of God? And are you not in the right?' So, our master Abu Bakr *God be pleased with him* said to him, 'Stick to your position, 'Umar, for he is the Messenger of God!'

This incident served to highlight the position of the Mother of Believers Umm Salama *God be pleased with her*, which was a position that expressed compassion, mercy, gentle and temperate counsel. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* went to her and said, 'The Muslims are ruined, Umm Salama: I commanded them but they did not obey.'

Consider the important role of the wife when her husband comes to her in a troubled state; here, her role as a source of tranquillity becomes manifest. Umm Salama said, 'Excuse them, O Messenger of God, for they are disappointed. Their souls were yearning to enter God's Sacred Mosque with their heads shaved and shorn, and then they were denied this when they were but a few miles away from it. Adhere to what God commanded you, and do not speak to anyone until you have done it; for if they see you do it, they will know that this is firm resolve.'

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* went by Umm Salama's advice, and did what God *the Most High* had commanded him and all the Muslims followed his lead, and that was that. Before they returned to Medina, God *the Most High* did not want to hold out on those who criticised this decision so that bitterness would not remain in the souls of the believers. This was a difficult thing for them, and so God *the Most High* did not extend the time before telling them the reason for it, and He gave them the explanation, saying to them: What saddens you about having to return to Medina? You have believing brethren in Mecca who have kept their faith secret and who live secretly amongst the disbelievers. Had you entered, and they fought you, you would have had to fight everyone, believers and disbelievers alike, and so you would have unknowingly killed your own brethren. Yet, if these brethren of yours were all apart in a separate section of Mecca, I would have given you permission to fight the idolaters, as you desired. God tells the believers that the Meccan idolaters had indeed disbelieved, prevented them from reaching the Sacred Mosque and prevented their offerings from reaching their intended place for sacrifice. And had it not been for believing men and women who had remained under cover in Mecca, whom they would have inadvertently trodden down – so that they would have been unknowingly dishonoured on their account – and that God will admit to His Mercy whom He liked, God would have given them permission to fight and enter Mecca. Had the believing men and women residing in Mecca under cover been apart, God would have inflicted on the disbelievers among them a painful punishment (*al-Fath*: 25).

After the revelation of the verse, the Muslims knew that the interdiction was for a reason and a wisdom; and when the next year came, God *the Most High* gave permission to the believers to fight during the sanctified months⁽¹⁾ if they were attacked: for a violation of sanctity is subject to the law of just retribution (*al-Baqara*: 194).

(1) In pre-Islam Arabia, by convention, Arab tribes acknowledged four months as 'sanctified,' meaning fighting was prohibited during these months, except in self-defence. These months were: *Dhu Al-Qi'da*, *Dhu Al-Hijja*, *Muharram*, and *Rajab*. The convention remained largely in force after the coming of Islam - Ed.

The True Lord *the Most High* was reassuring the believers: 'The ones who barred your way in the month of *Dhu Al-Qi'da* this year, you will fight them, and you will enter Mecca in *Dhu Al-Qi'da* of next year.' The Muslims feared that when they came the next year, Quraysh would violate the treaty and fight them, and so the True Lord *the Most High* revealed His command: 'And fight in the way of God those who fight you but do not transgress. Indeed, God does not like transgressors' (*al-Baqara*: 190).

If we reflect on God's words 'And fight in the Way of God,' we find that the True Lord *the Most High* emphasises the words 'in the Way of God' because He wants to place a barrier on man's use of force. The intention must be to fight in God's cause, not merely to fight in order to gain power and oppress and tyrannise. There should be no fighting for the sake of this life, or for wealth, or to protect economic markets, but rather, fighting should be for the sake of raising the word of God, and succouring the religion of God; this is the purpose of fighting in Islam.

'And fight in the way of God those who fight you but do not transgress. Indeed, God does not like transgressors' (*al-Baqara*: 190). The True Lord forbids aggression; that is, a Muslim should not fight anyone who does not fight him and should not transgress.

Suppose that Quraysh had been the ones to fight, but some people such as women, children, and the elderly did not fight the Muslims, even though they were on the side of those who did fight them; so in this case, it would not be permissible to fight those non-combatants; but rather, there can only be a reaction which is commensurate with the first action. Why? It is so because to fight women and the elderly is transgression, and He *the Exalted* does not like transgressors. Rather, the fighting of the believers can only be to combat aggression, not to instigate it.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَأَقْتُلُوهُمْ حَيْثُ ثَفَفْتُمُوهُمْ وَآخِرُجُوهُمْ مِّنْ حَيْثُ أَخْرَجُوهُمْ وَالْفَنَاءُ أَشَدُّ مِنَ الْقَتْلِ وَلَا تُقَاتِلُوهُمْ
عِنْدَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ حَتَّى يُفَعِّلُوا فِيهِ فَإِنْ فَعَلُوا فَتَلُواهُمْ فَاقتُلُوهُمْ كَذَلِكَ جَزَاءُ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿١٩١﴾

Kill them wherever you encounter them, and drive them out from where they drove you out, for persecution is more serious than killing. Do not fight them at the Sacred Mosque unless they fight you there. If they do fight you, kill them – this is what such disbelievers deserve [191]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 191)

We hear the words *thaqafa* and *thaqaf*, meaning ‘learning/culture’. Culture means refined education, or that you attain a certain amount of knowledge of various things. A person becomes cultured by possessing knowledge of a certain amount of information so that he knows something about everything, and then specialises in a branch of learning so that he knows all there is to know about one topic.

All of these abstract concepts are taken from concrete ones. The verb *thaqqafa* for the Arabs meant to straighten a branch; the Arabs would take tree branches to use as spears and staffs, and the branch would be bent or bulged, so the Arab would straighten (*thaqqafa*) it, i.e. remove its extraneous parts and its curvature; and then he would use a *thaqaf* which is a piece of hooked iron to straighten the bent branch, just as a reinforcement worker does with the iron used for building.

It is as though the educator (*muthaqqif*) is the one who straightens something which is crooked in the world so that a learner knows about this and that, and becomes properly refined. And so we find that linguistic concepts and words are derived from the concrete things around us. And in the expression in the verse at hand ‘...you shall find them...’ (*thaqiftumuhum*) means ‘find them’; so the verb *thaqifa* means ‘to find’.

In another verse, the True Lord *the Most High* tells the believers, if they find the infidels at war with them, to scatter them and make of them a fearsome example for those who follow them (*al-Anfal*: 57). That is, make them an example wherever you find them. God’s words ‘And kill them wherever you shall find them,...’ that is, do not merely say that they drove you out of

somewhere, but rather drive them from wherever they drove you, that is, from wherever it was that you were; in that case, you will not be aggressors. And His command '...and expel them from whatever place they have expelled you...' reminds us of a similar logic in another verse, when God commands the believers, if they are responding to an attack, to respond only to the extent of the attack levelled against them (*an-Nahl*: 126). And in another verse, He *the Exalted* states that the recompense of an evil deed is an evil deed like it (*ash-Shura*: 40).

If we look between the lines of this text, 'the recompense of an evil deed is an evil deed like it,' this notion might come to our minds: If I take my right from one who has done evil to me, and I take requital from him with an action which resembles what he did to me, can it be said that I have done an evil deed? In order to understand the matter, we need to know that the True Lord *the Most High* sometimes uses parallel expressions, meaning to describe something with a word which ordinarily means something else only because it is mentioned in that context. An illustrative example of this is God's statement that the infidels scheme, and God schemes (*Al- 'Imran*: 54): God does not scheme, but the word is used to bring about parallelism in the expression.

The noble verse may be interpreted in a different way also. It might mean that your claiming your right is also an 'evil deed' in order to alert you to the fact that, to seek your right of retaliation for what has been done to you, is considered evil if compared to showing clemency and forgiveness for the ill turn; and God *the Most High* points to this meaning at the end of the verse by saying that whoever pardons his foe and makes peace, his reward rests with God; indeed, God does not love evildoers (*ash-Shura*: 40). And the other aforementioned verse also ends with a similar admonition advising the believers to bear themselves with patience, as it is indeed far better for those who are patient in face of adversity (*an-Nahl*: 126).

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...and *fitna* (discord) is worse than killing....' The word *fitna* (rendered here as 'discord') is derived from a concrete concept: the practice of the goldsmith when he takes a piece of gold and places it in the fire to melt it, and if it had been mixed with any metal other than gold this metal will come out and the gold will become pure. So it is as though *fitna* means a trial and a test. The idolaters had done something

worse than killing, which is that they had tried to turn the believers away from their religion by torture, and so the believers fled away with their religion.

The True Lord *the Most High* commanded the believers, in the course of their fighting with the idolaters, to respect the sanctity of the Sacred Mosque so that they were not to violate it by fighting within it unless the idolaters attacked them there.

So, we find that the first commandment to fight only came as a response to aggression, and the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to remove from the hands of the enemies of Islam a card which they might have played against the Muslims. They knew that the believers in Islam would respect the sacred months and the sacred place and that they would respect their sanctity and so not fight within them; and perhaps this tempted the enemies of Islam to only fight the Muslims in the sacred months, thinking that the Muslims would be deterred from fighting them. The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to give them what they needed in this situation, and so He gave them permission to fight. If they fight you in the sacred month, fight them back in the sacred month; if they fight you in the sacred place, fight them back in the sacred place; and if they fight you when you are in a state of consecration for the pilgrimage, fight them back; for a violation of sanctity is subject to just retribution.

So, the True Lord *the Most High* took this card away from the hands of the disbelievers; and He *the Most High* justified this on the grounds that although fighting in the sacred months, or in the sacred place, or whilst in a state of consecration, is a very difficult thing, discord and oppression in the matter of God's religion is even worse than killing because oppression aims to corrupt the religion of the people. It is true that it does not prevent people from following religion, but it oppresses those who follow religion. They attempted to force the early Muslims by use of torture to give up their religion, and this was even worse than killing because it was oppression against the religion.

God is the One Who ordained the sacred months, so, how could the believers be oppressed and forced to give up God's religion for idolatry, and then say afterwards, 'We were in the sacred month'? The sacred month is only sacred because God made it sacred, and to be drawn away from God is idolatry, and this is worse than fighting in the sacred month. And so there is no call for anyone to

refrain from fighting in the sacred month when he is being oppressed on account of his religion, and when we know that this fighting is only in self-defence.

Having said this, a delicate question comes up: If fighting is about defence, is it only the defence of those who believe – as the enemies of Islam would like to make of it, and as those who want to defend Islam against the accusation that it is a religion of fighting say? We ask these people: Fighting for the defence of whom? It was for the defence of those who believe only? Or is it also fighting for the sake of all mankind's freedom to choose their religion?

This is also defence, and we will call it defence; but it is the defence of those who believe in that we defend them from those who aggress against them; and it is also a defence of those who do not believe in that we defend them from anything that threatens their freedom to choose their religion. So we are protecting their freedom to choose; we do not force them to accept the religion, but rather, we endeavour to make it so they are free to choose. If there is a power which forces people to accept a certain religion, we sweep this power out of the way, and we make the call to Islam; and if anyone stands in the way of this call, we fight them because they are ruining the right of the people to choose their religion; and this is also defence.

Then God says, '...and do not fight them at the Sacred Mosque, unless they fight you there....' This is because it is right and fitting that you respect that God *the Most High* has sanctified the Sacred Mosque, but if they dare to fight in the sacred Mosque, He *the Exalted* has given you leave, o Muslims, to fight them in the Sacred Mosque as long as they have attacked you there. The verse is concluded by saying, '...but if they fight you, kill them. Such is the reward of the infidels;' and the next verse says, 'But if they desist – indeed, God is Forgiving, Merciful.' (*al-Baqara*: 192) How magnanimous this religion is!

If they desist and find faith, we do not seek retribution from them for all that they did in their aggression against the believers, as long as they have come to have faith. This is why we see that when 'Umar ibn al-Khattab *God be pleased with him* passed by the killer of his brother Zaid ibn Al-Khattab and a man informed him that it was Zaid's killer, 'Umar *God be pleased with him* said, 'And what can I do to him after he has embraced Islam? Islam has made his blood sacrosanct.'

The matter ended with his embrace of Islam, for faith in God is dearer to the believer than his blood and his soul, and when he believes, the enmity ends. And there is Wahshi, the killer of the Prophet's uncle, Hamza *God be pleased with him*: The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* met with him after he had embraced Islam, and all that He *peace and blessings be upon him* did was to turn his face away from him; he did not kill him or take revenge on him. And the wife of Abu Sufiyan, Hind bint 'Utba, who ate Hamza's liver; she embraced Islam, and her deed was expunged by her Islam. So Islam is not a religion of grudges, or revenge, or the settling of scores; if the blood boils when one confronts disbelief, the disbeliever's faith in Islam gives him protection. This is what the religion means.

فَإِنْ أَنْهَوْا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿١٩٢﴾

**but if they stop, then God is most forgiving and
merciful [192] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 192)**

That is, as long as they cease their obstruction of the Islamic call and their idolatry, and are restrained by the authoritative religion, leaving behind their disbelief – after this, there will be no grudge between us and them; for God is Forgiving and Merciful. And so there should be no resentment in our souls because of what they did to us in the past, but rather, we should seek recompense for this from God. As long as they have believed, this is enough for us. After giving us the stages of fighting and its justifications, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّى لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةٌ وَيَكُونَ الدِّينُ لِلَّهِ فَإِنْ
أَنْهَوْا فَلَا عُدْوَانَ إِلَّا عَلَى الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿١٩٣﴾

**Fight them until there is no more persecution, and worship
is devoted to God. If they cease hostilities, there can be no
[further] hostility, except towards aggressors [193]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 193)**

We have already seen that *fitna* ('discord/oppression') originally means a trial and a test; this is the meaning we have in the rhetorical question put forth

by the True Lord *the Most High* as to whether people think that they will be left to say that they have believed, and they would not be tried (*al- 'Ankabut*).

The True Lord *the Most High* tests faith by means of fitna, and He sees whether those who claim to have faith will be able to steadfastly bear the trials therein or not. If embracing Islam does not lead to engaging in a war or fighting, and could not lead to the martyrdom of some of the believers, it would be tempting for many people to embrace Islam; but God made their test that they be defeated, or that some of them be martyred so that only the elite who could bear the honour of the mission, and protect the earth from corruption, would embrace the religion; the believers had to be the finest of people. This is why God *the Most High* says, 'And fight against them until there be no more fitna (discord)....'

The meaning of '...and the only worship be that of God...' is: remove them from the religions they invented themselves, or from the religions which the tyrants imposed upon them. When we take them from the religions which the oppressors forced upon them, and the religions which others made alluring to them, to the religion of the Creator, this is something good for them, and it is a lofty mission.

By undertaking this lofty mission, you guide the human mind and prevent it from worshipping something which is equal to it and make it worship God Who created it; so, he whose mind is guided this way should thank the one who guides him to this straight path. This truth is made plain in God's command to His Messenger to declare to his people that he asks no payment for his efforts in his mission other than that whoever wishes might take a way to his Lord (*al-Furqan*: 57).

It is as though if we look at what the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* did for us from an economic point of view, we would conclude that he should be rewarded because he has done something beneficial for us; yet, despite the good he has done for us he asks for no payment because he renounces this reward, knowing as he does that a reward from an equal is small, no matter how great it might seem; he wants reward from his Creator, and this is the highest of aspirations as no one gives reward for faith except God *the Most High*, and He gives without any limits.

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes this noble verse by saying, ‘...but if they desist, then let there be no hostility, except against the wrongdoers.’ That is, if they stop fighting you, you will not assault them, but rather, you will only respond to the aggression of the wrongdoers amongst them. When a wrongdoer aggresses, he thinks that no one is able to stop him; it is as if the True Lord *the Most High* wants us to say to such an aggressor: Indeed, we are able to stop you, and we will respond to your aggression as you have aggressed against us. And the True Lord *the Most High* gives us the details of this when He *the Exalted* says:

الشَّهْرُ الْحَرَامُ بِالشَّهْرِ الْحَرَامِ وَالْحُرُمَتِ قِصَاصٌ فَمَنْ أَعْتَدَى عَلَيْكُمْ فَأَعْتَدُوا
عَلَيْهِ بِمِثْلِ مَا أَعْتَدَى عَلَيْكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿١٩٤﴾

A sacred month for a sacred month: violation of sanctity [calls for] fair retribution. So if anyone commits aggression against you, attack him as he attacked you, but be mindful of God, and know that He is with those who are mindful of Him [194] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 194)

The meaning of this is: If they fight you in the sacred month, fight them back in the sacred month; if they violate the sanctity of a period of time, just retribution will be taken in the same period of time; and if they violate the sanctity of a place, just retribution will be taken in the same place; and if they violate the sanctity of the state of consecration, the response will be in the same state of consecration. This is because just retribution is to give back to the wronged person the same as the wrongdoer took from him.

The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to reassure and comfort the believers who were turned back in the year of the events of al-Hudaibiya in the month of *Dhu Al-Qi‘da* in the sixth year of the *Hijra*, when the idolaters forced them back to Medina. And God restored their respect for them by making them return in the month of *Dhu Al-Qi‘da* of the following year, the seventh of the *Hijra*. Since they had been denied access in the sacred month, God wanted them to return to visit the Mosque in the sacred month, the very same time.

The words of the True Lord *the Most High*: ‘...and for [all] violations is legal retribution....’ require us to ask: How can this be? What does it mean for something to be sanctified (*haram*)? If something is *haram*, this means it must not be violated, whilst if something is permitted (*halal*), it means something which is allowed and permissible. Does this mean that if someone does something forbidden (*haram*), we should take just retribution by doing something similar to him?

If a man fornicates with a woman, do we say that we should take retribution on him by cuckolding him? No. Just retribution for things which are inviolable only applies to those things which have been specifically allowed. Likewise, if someone steals my money and I have no proof, but I am convinced that he is the one who stole from me, can I take retribution from him by stealing something from him? No; just retribution is only for plain and proven things; as for unproven things, we cannot take our own retribution from someone according to what they did.

But imagine there is a member of your family whom you are required to provide for, and you refuse to give him anything – which is unlawful for you to do: Since you are not within your right to refrain from providing for them, they have the right to take from your money and use it to eat, and this is just retribution. Consider the example of Hind bint ‘Utba, wife of Abu Sufiyan, who complained to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* about her husband’s stinginess and that he does not provide sufficiently for his family; and he answered her: ‘Take rightfully, from his money, what you and your child need.’ Another example is: Suppose you have a guest in your house, but you refuse to extend to him your hospitality, and he takes advantage of the fact that you are far from where he is sitting and takes something and eats it. He will not be wronging you as long as he does not do anything else which is unlawful. Beyond that, the True Lord *the Most High* leaves it up to the authorities to deal with these things so that matters do not break down into chaos. God’s words ‘...So whoever has assaulted you, then assault him in the same way that he has assaulted you....’ call us to attention so that no one can deceive us and pretend to be a believer when actually he is after revenge. We need to keep in mind the saying of the poet:

If the scorpion comes back, we are back at it:

With the shoe, and the shoe is ready for it!

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the noble verse by saying, ‘...And fear God and know that God is with those who fear Him.’ That is, do not think that God has given you dominion over them; rather, they and you are all under the dominion of God.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَأَنْفِقُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تُلْقُوا بِأَيْدِيكُمْ إِلَى التَّهْلُكَةِ وَأَحْسِنُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١٩٥﴾

**Spend in God’s cause: do not contribute to your
destruction with your own hands, but do good, for God
loves those who do good [195] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 195)**

This verse comes after the verses about fighting, and it means: Prepare yourselves to fight in the Way of God. God’s words ‘...and do not throw [yourselves] with your [own] hands into destruction [by refraining]....’ require us to know that the word ‘destruction’ (*tahluka*) is in the morphological form *taf’ula*, which is not attested to in the Arabic language except in this one word. There is no word in the Arabic language which has the morphological form of *taf’ula* except for the word (*tahluka*). ‘Destruction’ (*Tahluka*) means to perish, that is, for something to leave its proper state so that it is uncertain what will become of it. An example of this is the perishing of a person which comes when his spirit leaves his body. We find the verb form of this word used in another verse where the True Lord *the Most High* says that he who would perish (in the battle between faith and disbelief) 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).

So, to perish is the opposite of living; and one should know that life is not just the sensation and movement that we witness, but rather, the life of each thing has its own exact nature: the life of animals has its laws, and the life of vegetables has its laws, and the life of minerals has its laws; this is evidenced by the fact that the True Lord *the Most High* contrasted ‘perishing’ with ‘living’, and He *the Exalted* also said that everything is bound to perish, except His Face (*al-Qasas*: 88).

So, we are not the only ones, who will perish, nor the animals, nor the vegetables; but rather, it will be everything, including minerals. Minerals will perish just as we will, and as long as they will perish, this means they have life, but it is not like our life; it is rather, a life with its own laws. Every created being has a purpose to fulfil, and this is its life.

God's words '...and do not throw [yourselves] with your [own] hands into destruction [by refraining]...' show us an example of the exquisite rhetorical style of the Quran, for a single sentence gives us one thing and its contrary, and this is something you do not find in the styles of human speech. The True Lord *the Most High* directs us in this verse 'And spend in the Way of God...' that is, spend to support the struggle, and then He says, '...and do not throw [yourselves] with your [own] hands into destruction [by refraining]....' Why? Because spending means to give money to someone else who is doing something for you to help with the struggle in God's Way, such as making weapons or supplying provisions, or establishing buildings and fortifications; these are different ways in which money is spent.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...and do not throw [yourselves] with your [own] hands into destruction [by refraining]....' The word 'throw' implies that there is something high and something else lower than it, as though God is saying: Do not cast yourselves into destruction. But would any of us cast himself into destruction, or cast himself into destruction amongst his enemies? No; rather, the hand which refuses to spend in God's Way is the one which throws its owner into destruction as when he refuses to do so, the enemy will be able to get to him. When the enemy is able to get to the believers, he will oppress them in the teachings of their religion, and if he oppresses them in their religion, they will be destroyed. So to prepare for war is the best means of deterring war, and when the enemy sees that you are strong he will fear you, and will be reluctant to fight you.

Just as the True Lord *the Most High*, by legislating fighting, wanted us to be ready for war, He commands us to properly and accurately weigh up the matter of fighting so that we are not overcome by false confidence or wild enthusiasm. So the meaning of this is: Do not begin to fight unless you strongly believe that you will win. Judiciousness might require you to weigh things up very carefully,

and bravery might mean that you hold back and refrain from fighting sometimes, in order that you can gain victory later when you are ready for it.

The first meaning makes you spend in God's Way, and not throw yourself into destruction by refusing to fight; the second meaning is that you do not let your own hands throw you into destruction by beginning to fight for no good reason, or without being sufficiently prepared. The True Lord *the Most High* wants the believers to weigh things up so that they neither leave off the struggle and so perish when their enemies are thus emboldened against them, and neither does He want them to let their own hands throw them into fighting simply out of a desire to fight without being properly prepared for it. This is the judiciousness of faith; and one single sentence has given us all these meanings.

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by saying, '...And do good; indeed, God loves the doers of good.' The True Lord *the Most High* says 'do good,' and to do good, as the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us, is 'To worship God' – that is, to obey His commands – 'as though you see Him; for if you do not see Him, He sees you.'⁽¹⁾

The problem with people these days, is that they emulate 'He sees you,' putting hidden cameras in large places so that they can monitor the work people are doing everywhere. This is what human beings do; but look at the loftiness of faith which commands you to see God so that , you do not do your work in a superficial disinterested way just to get it off your back, but rather, you must work with the intention of working as best as you can.

To do one's best in everything is to do it as well as possible so that one person does for another the same he would like the other to do for him. If all people acted according to this basis, all production would be exemplary, but if cheating takes over, you cheat others and others cheat you, and then we will be prattle away with complaints. And so we should do our best in everything: for example, we should do our best when we spend charitably, and we will not attain to this unless we do our best in the work which brings us the money that we spend; for money is the fruit of work, and there can be no spending without money, and you take the recompense for your work and spend it on those things you need.

(1) *Part of a Hadith narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

The sphere of goodness encompasses not only fighting, and so the command here is a general one. Do not think that this is just a subsidiary matter of the religion which is meant to be applied to a single aspect of life; but rather, every aspect of the religion is meant to be applied to every aspect of life. If doing good is connected with money, this means that one must do one's best in all one's actions in life, and must do enough work to provide sufficiently for himself and for those whom he supports, and then leave him enough to do good charitable works with.

If money is not available to you, you must do good using your influential position by interceding for others. Islam has reformed the concept of influence, i.e. it has given it a moral basis, and so people who have influence should use it to intercede and help people to get their rights. Influential people should also take the weak under their wing and protect them from the oppression and tyranny of the strong, and should use their influence to establish justice in the environment in which they live.

Influence means that a person is respected, or valued, or esteemed, and these things are all based on the prior goodness of a person; he has not attained them without reason, but rather, he did something in the past which made him reputable in the eyes of people. People normally do not respect anyone unless he has done them some kind of favour, and so it is as though their respect comes at a price, and it is not free. Benefaction could also be by imparting knowledge to those who do not have it, or by using bodily strength to aid the weak, or by extending one's experience to help others, or by relieving Muslims from a distressful situation.

So, there are many ways to do good, and they all serve the cause of faith. When the disbeliever sees the believers and each one of them is doing his work as well as he can, this will attract him to faith. If we ask ourselves: What is it that has made our modern world reject our faith? We find that the world judges the religion of God by the actions of the Muslims, which are mostly un-Islamic in nature. It is true that some of the intellectuals and philosophers of the west do not judge Islam by the actions of the Muslims; and this is very fair of them, because it might be that some Muslims, who are attached to Islam only nominally, do not adhere to the teachings of their religion, and so no one should judge Islam by his actions just because he is a Muslim by name.

The followers of other religions know that there are things which their religions have prohibited. Since their religions have prohibited them and set punishments for them, this indicates that they might well occur. When you see a person who is attached to Islam and yet steals, do you say, 'Muslims are thieves'? No; you should look as to whether the laws of Islam consider the thief to be a criminal or not. So no one should say, 'Look at the state of the Muslims,' but rather, they should look to the laws of Islam because God allowed for the possibility that human beings would do all kinds of actions, good and bad, and so He commended good actions and made bad ones punishable.

Intellectuals and thinkers judge religion by its principles, not by the actions of people attached to it; for the on-looker might see someone contravening the religion by doing something it prohibits; so, do not consider the sinful action as representing Islam, but rather consider it as being outside Islam.

When the world sees us as people who do good in everything, we will give them the example that our forefathers were upon, which made Islam spread in such an unprecedented way so that within half a century, it reached the eastern and western limits of the world, after which it faded as a political force from the world, but remained as a religion, and there remained for Islam the order which draws people to it. Islam has its own intrinsic 'immune system' to maintain its preservation and its wholeness, and this is what attracts non-Muslims to it so they believe in it; it is not the Muslims who draw people to Islam.

And so I say: If the political representatives of the Islamic nations in the civilised non-Islamic lands had adopted the principles of Islam, they would have been a sound role-model.

Look at any single capital city in a western country, and you will find more than sixty-three Islamic embassies, each with a staff of more than twenty people. Imagine if they were all good Islamic role-models in their behaviour and dealings, in a non-Islamic capital city. If this were the case, the inhabitants of that land would find a practising Islamic community not infatuated with the charms of urban life, not drinking wine, or dancing, or frequenting places of ill-repute, nor having their women display themselves wantonly; by God, would the decorum of these people go unnoticed?

But what actually happens – unfortunately – is that the people of the west, despite their being misguided, have overcome the sons of Islam, despite the guidance they have in their religion, and have taken them into their dissolution; and this blind imitation makes the westerners say: ‘If Islam had any means of protection, it would have protected its sons from falling into that which we fell into.’

So, for the Muslims to do good, would be the greatest way to call and invite others to the religion of Islam. The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...indeed, God loves the doers of good.’ As we know, love means the inclination of the heart of the lover to the beloved, and this is the case with respect to the human realm. As for the True Lord, it means the affection shown by the Creator in the form of mercy and honour upon the creature. The True Lord *the Most High* loves for His servants to adopt His moral standards; just as He makes excellent everything that He creates (*as-Sajda: 7*), He wants His servants, having given them thinking minds to plan, and power so that thoughts can become actions – The True Lord *the Most High* wants us to make our guiding principle in all our actions to do them well so that , we adopt the moral standards of God, and the word ‘o God’ proliferates in admiration – this noble word with which a person greets every beautiful thing in any kind of craft, saying ‘o God!’

So, the proliferation of the word ‘God’ is a blessing in existence inasmuch as it is an exclamation on every good thing; even those who do not believe in the Deity also say ‘God!’ It is as though the natural disposition which God has instilled in man announces that every good thing must be ascribed to God: whether God did it directly by means of causality and natural laws, or whether He created the one who did the good thing, everything goes back to God in the end.

If those who do not work well knew what they were depriving the world of, they would feel ashamed of themselves; it would be bad enough for them to only be depriving the world of the word ‘God’, but they are also making it so that the word ‘God’ is replaced by foul words, and so they are spreading ugliness in existence; and when ugliness spreads through existence, all mankind lose out.

So, God's words '...indeed, God loves the doers of good' are an encouragement to everyone who undertakes any work to do it well, in order that they adopt God's moral standards. After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَأَتِمُّوا الْحَجَّ وَالْعُمْرَةَ لِلَّهِ فَإِنْ أُخْصِرْتُمْ فَمَا اسْتَيْسَرَ مِنَ الْهَدْيِ وَلَا تَحْلِقُوا رُءُوسَكُمْ حَتَّىٰ يَبْلُغَ الْهَدْيُ مَحَلَّهُ، فَمَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ مَّرِيضًا أَوْ بِهِ أَذًى مِنْ رَأْسِهِ، فَفِدْيَةٌ مِنْ صِيَامٍ أَوْ صَدَقَةٍ أَوْ نُسُكٍ فَإِذَا أَمِنْتُمْ فَمَنْ تَمَنَّعَ بِالْعُمْرَةِ إِلَى الْحَجِّ فَمَا اسْتَيْسَرَ مِنَ الْهَدْيِ فَمَنْ لَمْ يَجِدْ فَصِيَامًا ثَلَاثَةَ أَيَّامٍ فِي الْحَجِّ وَسَبْعَةً إِذَا رَجَعْتُمْ تِلْكَ عَشْرَةٌ كَامِلَةٌ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ أَهْلَهُ، حَاضِرِ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ ﴿١٩٦﴾

Complete the pilgrimages, major and minor, for the sake of God.

If you are prevented [from doing so], then [send] whatever offering for sacrifice you can afford, and do not shave your heads until the offering has reached the place of sacrifice. If any of you is ill, or has an ailment of the scalp, he should compensate by fasting, or feeding the poor, or offering sacrifice. When you are in safety, anyone wishing to take a break between the minor pilgrimage and the major one must make whatever offering he can afford. If he lacks the means, he should fast for three days during the pilgrimage, and seven days on his return, making ten days in all.

This applies to those whose household is not near the Sacred Mosque. Always be mindful of God, and be aware that He is stern in His retribution [196] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 196)

So, the discourse concerning the pilgrimage comes here in its natural context; and when God *the Most High* says, 'And accomplish the Pilgrimage and 'umra (lesser pilgrimage) for God...' we understand from this that the command to 'accomplish' (*itmam*) something is not issued unless there has already been a command enjoining this thing; it is that you begin the action after it has been legislated, and He *the Exalted* wants from you not only to perform the pilgrimage, but to accomplish it, and make it whole so that it meets all of the requirements of the One Who ordained it.

When the True Lord *the Most High* says, 'And accomplish the Pilgrimage and 'umra (lesser pilgrimage)...', someone might say: Pilgrimage is one

thing, and 'Umra is another, which is indicated by the fact that they are connected by the conjunction 'and', which implies distinction as well as correspondence so that if there is correspondence, but not distinction, it does not make sense, but rather, there must be both correspondence and distinction. The correspondence between the pilgrimage and the 'Umra is that they are both religious rites and acts of worship, whilst the distinction between them is that the pilgrimage has a set time and must include a standing at Mount 'Arafa, whilst the 'umra has no set time and does not require a standing at 'Arafa.

But when the True Lord *the Most High* legislated the pilgrimage, He declared that pilgrimage to the House (Sacred Mosque) is a duty owed to God by all people who are able to undertake it (*al- 'Imran*: 97).

In this verse, He did not mention the 'umra, and from this we can infer that the pilgrimage is one thing and the 'Umra is another, and that the one which is obligatory for us is the pilgrimage. Because of this, I always say that we must take the Quran as a unified whole, and we must consider every verse which refers to a particular subject in order to understand it properly. When the True Lord *the Most High* also says in the Quran, 'And accomplish the Pilgrimage and 'umra (lesser pilgrimage) for God,...' we can infer from this that the 'umra is not the same thing as the pilgrimage. And when you read God's words in the chapter of *Bara'a* (also known as *at-Tawba*) about a proclamation from God and His Messenger to all mankind on the day of the Greatest Pilgrimage (*at-Tawba*: 3), We know that there is a 'Greatest Pilgrimage' as well as a second 'great' pilgrimage. Therefore, the verse saying that pilgrimage to the House (Sacred Mosque) is a duty owed to God by all people who are able to undertake it (*Al- 'Imran*: 97) contains a reference to the Sacred Mosque, which is the common factor shared by the pilgrimage and the 'Umra. We know that the 'Greatest Pilgrimage' is the pilgrimage in which the Muslim stands at Mount 'Arafa, because the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Pilgrimage is 'Arafa.'⁽¹⁾ It is the 'Greatest Pilgrimage' because the throngs which gather at 'Arafa are immense; and it comes at a specific time, and the standing at 'Arafa is an essential requisite of it.

(1) Narrated by Ahmad, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nasa'i, and Ibn Maja

So, in God's statement that pilgrimage to the House (Sacred Mosque) is a duty owed to God by all people who are able to undertake it (*Al- 'Imran*: 97), the word 'pilgrimage' means travelling towards a sanctified thing, namely the 'pilgrimage to the House.' As for the '*umra*', it is the 'great pilgrimage,' and it can be undertaken at any time of the year, and those who go to visit the House scattered in time throughout the whole year. This was confirmed in legislation when God said that pilgrimage to the House (Sacred Mosque) is a duty owed to God by all people who are able to undertake it (*Al- 'Imran*: 97), as long as He gave a joint commandment by saying 'pilgrimage to the House,' this means both the greatest pilgrimage and the great pilgrimage.

The True Lord *the Most High* addresses His servants and He knows that some people will undertake acts of worship in a superficial way, and they might undertake acts of worship for other reasons besides worship. It was therefore necessary to make clear the purpose of the pilgrimage and the '*umra*', and that what is required is that they be performed completely, and that the intention must be to honour God and nothing else; not so that you earn the title of '*Hajj*', or for trade where you buy cheap wares and sell them at a profit when you return home.

We know that the pilgrimage is the one act of worship which continues to be associated with the one who performs it; we do not say 'So-and-so the performer of the prayer', or 'So-and-so the giver of the alms'. Therefore, if the one who makes the pilgrimage is eager to be given the title '*Hajj*', and this is the reason why he does this act of worship, he, inevitably thereby, takes his act of worship outside the purpose for which it was ordained. The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'And accomplish the Pilgrimage and '*umra* (lesser pilgrimage) for God....' The words 'for God' impart to us numerous matters; what are they?

When a Muslim wants to perform the pilgrimage in honour of God, it is not correct that he make the pilgrimage with money earned by any means other than those which God has ordained. Many people, when they hear the Noble Hadith: 'He who performs pilgrimage and commits neither lewdness nor wickedness returns as he was the day his mother gave birth to him,'⁽¹⁾ believe that a person

(1) Narrated by *Al-Bukhari, An-Nasa'i, Ibn Maja, and Ahmad* on the authority of *Abu Hurayra* God be pleased with him.

can commit whatever acts of disobedience and injustice that he wants, and then imagine that a single pilgrimage will expiate for him all his sins. We say to such as these: First of all, the pilgrimage must be in honour of God.

Secondly, it must be made with lawfully-earned money. As long as it is in honour of God and made with lawfully-earned money, we must then, know which sins are expiated after the pilgrimage. Not all sins are expiated, but rather only those sins in relation with God *the Most High*; for when you sin against God you do not wrong Him, but rather, you wrong yourself; however, when you sin against your fellow men you do them ill, or usurp their rights; and wrongs committed against one's fellow men can only be expiated by returning to them their rights.

We know that the *'umra* means to visit the Sacred Mosque (the *Ka'ba*), and this can be done at any time of the year, and that the pilgrimage means to visit the Sacred Mosque, and this is done at a specific time of the year. Some scholars say: Since each of them is a separate devotion, is it permissible to do them both together, or should each one be offered separately from the other?

Each of them has a point of view as to which way is best and most preferable; as for those who say that to perform the pilgrimage (*Hajj*) separately is better, this is because it means that each devotion will have its own journey devoted to it. Others say that one should do them both together, entering into ritual consecration (*ihram*) for both, the pilgrimage and the *'umra*, with a single consecration so that , he first goes and performs the rites of the *'umra* and then remains in his state of ritual consecration until he performs the pilgrimage. In this case, he will have done both acts together, that is he will have done them in one single state of ritual consecration; and this is what some of the scholars prefer because God knows that the servant has performed two rites with a single consecration. There are also those who perform *tamattu'*, that is to perform the *'umra* and then come out of the state of consecration after it, and then re-enter the state of consecration once more before the pilgrimage begins in order to perform it. This is called *tamattu'*, and the pilgrim who does it is called *mutamatti* 'because he comes out of the state of consecration. Some of the scholars say that *tamattu'* is best because the person separates the two acts in a way which means he is not doing the cust'Umary thing: he enters the state of consecration, and then leaves it, and then enters it once more.

So, every scholar has his point of view, and so it is as though God does not want to excessively limit His servants' options in their performance of rites in any way, and the Lawgiver *the Most High* made provisions when ordaining responsibilities, and took all conditions into account, whether those things which can occur without the intervention of any adversary, namely the vicissitudes of fate, or whether those things which occur because of adversaries, namely those things which have other causes. And so He *the Exalted* said, '...But if you are prevented, then [offer] what can be obtained with ease of sacrificial animals....' The term 'prevented' (*uhsirtum* in the original) is derived from the verb *hasara*, which refers to the vicissitudes of fate, and the other related verb *ahsara* is used to refer to the actions of someone, such as the intervention of the enemy, as when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was held back in the year of Hudaybiya, and he was prevented from entering Mecca that year. Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* facilitates things for us, as though He were saying to us: I will not overlook the willingness of My servants, nor their intentions, nor their preparations, nor their ritual consecration; and if you are held back, '...then [offer] what can be obtained with ease of sacrificial animals....' The 'offering' here means that which is sacrificed as an act of seeking God's pleasure, and an expiation of what has happened.

After this, God *the Most High* says, '...And do not shave your heads until the sacrificial animal has reached its place of sacrifice....' That is, until it has reached the place set aside for this purpose. This is if you are the one who is managing the sacrifice; but if you are not, there is no need for you to slaughter it yourself, but rather, you can ask someone to slaughter it for you. And His words '...And when you are secure, then whoever performs 'umra [during the Pilgrimage months] followed by Pilgrimage [offers] what can be obtained with ease of sacrificial animals...' mean that it is correct for one to sacrifice the offering before 'Arafa, and it is also correct for him to leave it until the day of the Sacrifice (*Eid Al-Adha*), and it is also correct for him to sacrifice it after all that.

The phrase '...what can be obtained with ease of sacrificial animals...' also means 'if it is easy to obtain an offering,' whether because it is easy to pay the price for it, or easy to buy it; for the price might be at hand, but the

merchandise might not be available. The word 'offering' (*hady*) means that which is offered to the Sanctuary, or that which guides a person to the way of righteousness; it is derived from the word *huda* (guidance), which means the way that leads to the desired end.

God *the Most High* says, '...And do not shave your heads until the sacrificial animal has reached its place of sacrifice. And whoever among you is ill or has an ailment of the head [making shaving necessary, must offer] a ransom....' This refers to the ill person who cannot make the sacrifice, and suffers from an ailment of the head, like the Companion who had head-lice which caused him pain, so, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* instructed him: 'Shave your head and fast three days, or feed six poor people, or sacrifice a ram.'⁽¹⁾

These are successive legislations, and each one has its occasion: just as He legislated that the one who is held back should give whatever offering he can afford, He legislated that someone who needs to shave his head because of illness or an ailment of the head should do one of three things: fasting, charity or sacrifice.

Anyone who reflects on these three things will find that they are given in ascending order: Fasting is something which does not give any direct benefit to others; and charity is an act of worship which gives benefit to others, but in a limited way because it is the feeding of six people, for example; and to sacrifice means to slaughter, and a great many people can benefit from the meat that comes from this.

So, look at the progression of benefit: either fasting three days, or feeding six poor people, or slaughtering a sacrificial animal, namely a ram. This is an ascent from the weakest to the strongest, each according to his power and ability.

When the True Lord *the Most High* ordains specific expiations, this is to ensure that the required actions of the pilgrimage will be observed, and to accommodate the conditions and state of the Muslim. In the case of *tamattu*, (performing *'umra* before pilgrimage), for example, He allowed the pilgrim to divide the fast into two stages: three days whilst on the pilgrimage, and seven

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

upon returning. This is the progressive ascent of legislations, and the possibility of choosing the easier path, in order that, the Muslim can get out of the difficulty he is in.

‘...And whoever among you is ill or has an ailment of the head [making shaving necessary, must offer] a ransom of fasting [three days] or charity or sacrifice. And when you are secure, then whoever performs ‘*umra* [during the Pilgrimage months] followed by Pilgrimage [offers] what can be obtained with ease of sacrificial animals. And whoever cannot find [or afford such an animal] – then, a fast of three days during Pilgrimage and of seven when he has returned [home]....’

The words ‘whoever cannot find...’ mean that he does not possess it, and so to the one who does not possess it we say: Do not do what many people do before they perform circumambulation of the *Ka’ba*. Some of them go to the market and buy gifts, and then when the time for the sacrificial offering comes they say, ‘I cannot afford it, and so, I will fast.’ We ask them: Would not the price of all those gifts have been enough to buy the sacrificial offering?

It is indeed strange for a pilgrim to buy all kinds of presents, clocks and electric devices, and fill his bags, and then say, ‘I cannot afford to buy the sacrificial offering.’ Is this not cheating and deception? The one who does this cheats himself.

So, God’s words ‘whoever cannot find...’ mean he who cannot truly afford it, not he who spends his money on presents and then, empties his hands. Therefore, those who do the rites of the pilgrimage properly do not buy their gifts until after finishing all the required rites, and if they have some money left over, they buy what they can afford.

Those who spend all their money on gifts and then come to the point of offering ‘...what can be obtained with ease of sacrificial animals...’ and say, ‘We do not have enough to buy the offering; we will fast’ – it is strange that they only remember to fast when they return home. Would it not be better for them to fast right from the start, since they know that they cannot afford to pay for the offering when they enter into consecration for the pilgrimage and ‘*Umra*’

One should begin to fast the three days right away, so, his excuse will come first, not last. Some scholars allow fasting the three days of *tashriq* that is the three days after the *Eid* (Feast). These days were given the name *tashriq* (from *shurouq*, meaning sunrise) because people would leave the meat in the sun (*sharraqa*), so, it would dry and become jerked. After this, when he is done with all the rites, the pilgrim can either fast the remaining seven days on the way home, or when he gets home; he can choose what suits him best. '...And whoever cannot find [or afford such an animal] – then, a fast of three days during Pilgrimage and of seven when you have returned [home]. Those are ten full [days].' It is clear that 'three' plus 'seven' equals 'ten', and this is emphasised so that people do not think that the meaning is either three days or seven days, and so He said 'ten full' so that it would not be misunderstood.

Perhaps the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to alert us to the fact that the one who fasts will fast ten days, and these days will serve to fulfil the performance of the rites, and the one who sacrifices is not better than the one who fasts; as long as he could not afford the sacrificial offering and so fasted ten days, he has the same reward and recompense as the one who could afford to and sacrificed. Be careful not to think that fasting lessens the reward, or that it is lower than sacrificing.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...This is for those whose family is not in the area of *Al-Masjid Al-Haram* (the Sacred Mosque)...'. This legislation refers to the one whose family does not live in Mecca. We know that the limits of the Sacred Mosque of Worship cover twelve miles, and that those who live within these limits are not obliged to sacrifice or fast. Why not? Some scholars say that it is because those who live near the sacred Mosque are in the habit of always circumambulating it, and this means they do not need to perform the *'umra*, and so if they perform the pilgrimage, they are not included in this legislation.

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes this verse by saying, '...And fear God and know that God is severe in punishment.' Why would the True Lord *the Most High* say that He is 'severe in punishment' right after ordaining these dispensations of ease? This means, be careful not to cheat with these

dispensations of ease, as it is not conceivable that it could be acceptable for us to cheat in any of them; and so He *the Exalted* warns us against cheating in any of these rites by saying, ‘...and know that God is severe in punishment.’

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

الْحَجُّ أَشْهُرٌ مَّعْلُومَةٌ فَمَنْ فَرَضَ فِيهِنَّ الْحَجَّ فَلَا رَفَثَ وَلَا فُسُوقَ
وَلَا جِدَالَ فِي الْحَجِّ وَمَا تَفَعَّلُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ يَعْلَمُهُ اللَّهُ وَتَكْرَدُوا
فَإِنَّ خَيْرَ الْبَرِّ النَّفْقَىٰ ۚ وَاتَّقُوا إِلَٰهَ الَّذِي أَلْزَمَ

**The pilgrimage takes place during the prescribed months.
There should be no indecent speech, misbehavior, or
quarrelling for anyone undertaking the pilgrimage –
whatever good you do, God is well aware of it. Provide well
for yourselves: the best provision is to be mindful of God –
always be mindful of Me, you who have understanding [197]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 197)**

We notice here that the True Lord *the Most High*, when speaking about fasting, has specified its month: ‘The month of *Ramadan* [is that] in which the Quran was sent down...’ (*al-Baqara*: 185), yet, He did not mention the months of the pilgrimage, *Shawwal*, *Dhu Al-Qi‘da*, and ten days of *Dhu Al-Hijja*, whilst He did mention *Ramadan*. This is because the legislation concerned with *Ramadan* was special and unfamiliar to the Arabs, and so its time had to be specified, whilst the pilgrimage was known to the Arabs before Islam, and they knew its months and everything about it. It was therefore not necessary to mention the names of the months reserved for it, and these well-known months were: *Shawwal*, *Dhu Al-Qi‘da*, and ten days from *Dhu Al-Hijja* which ended with the standing at ‘*Arafa*’ and the days of *Mina*. The month of the pilgrimage only lasts for ten days, but it was counted with *Shawwal* and *Dhu Al-Qi‘da* because a fraction of a month is counted as the month.

The word ‘well-known’ gives us the wisdom in the names of the months of pilgrimage not being mentioned since they were already known to them.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...so whoever has made Pilgrimage obligatory upon himself therein....’ But it is not the person who makes things obligatory

in this case; rather, obligations come from God, who made the pilgrimage an obligatory pillar of the religion; and if you hold yourself to it with intention and action, and you set off intending to make the pilgrimage at the time reserved for the pilgrimage, you thereby impose the pilgrimage upon yourself for the season in which you choose to do it, and it becomes binding on you. And the expression 'make obligatory' (*farada*) shows that you bind yourself to the pilgrimage even if it is only recommended i.e. not mandatory.

God says, '...so whoever has made pilgrimage obligatory upon himself therein [by entering the state of ihram (ritual consecration)], there is [to be for him] no lewd speech and no transgression and no wrangling during Pilgrimage....' The word 'lewd' (*rafath*) refers to actions of the tongue; the eye and the other parts of the body also have their own lewd actions, and they all come together in the process of sexual intercourse and its preambles. The lewdness of the tongue during the pilgrimage means to speak about sexual intercourse, and the lewdness of the eye means to look at a woman with sexual desire. So lewdness means everything which leads up to sexual intercourse, or it means sexual intercourse itself, or those things which lead to it in the form of words, or looks, or actions.

Although lewdness is permissible under certain conditions outside of the pilgrimage, they are forbidden within it. As for transgression, it is forbidden both within the pilgrimage and outside it. It is as though God is drawing attention to the fact that although it might be possible for a Muslim to commit wickedness outside of the pilgrimage, it would be terrible manners for a Muslim in the House of God to do wicked things. Transgression is forbidden at all times, and so the True Lord *the Most High* is here alerting those who sin against themselves; they must remember that although they might have committed evil when far away from the House of God, they should be ashamed to disobey God in His own House. The one who goes to the House of God seeks to cleanse himself of his sins, and so does it make sense for him to sin while he is there? You must have shame, o Muslim, when you are in the House of God, and know that this is the only place where you are held accountable even for merely willing or intending something: God *the Most High* states that whoever intends therein a deed of deviation from religion or wrongdoing, He will make him taste a painful punishment (*al-Hajj*: 25).

So, sexual contact is permissible in certain situations, but forbidden in the Sacred Mosque (*Ka'ba*), whilst wickedness is forbidden at all times, and especially in the Sacred Mosque (*Ka'ba*).

And wrangling, although it is permissible outside the pilgrimage, must not take place during the pilgrimage. We should be aware that the level of wrangling is lower than the level of wicked conduct, and lower than the level of disobedience. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'He who performs the pilgrimage and commits neither lewdness nor wickedness returns as he was the day his mother gave birth to him,'⁽¹⁾ but he did not say, 'and does not wrangle.' The humanity of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* made allowances for the various states of Muslims; it is possible that wrangling might come up during the pilgrimage as a result of an action which provokes it. It is as though the absence of the mention of wrangling in the Hadith is an accommodation for the believer – but we cannot go to extremes in it.

Arguing is permissible outside of the pilgrimage, which is evidenced by the verse in which God commands His Messenger to argue with non-believers in the most kindly manner (*an-Nahl*: 125). However, in pilgrimage, there can be no arguing during it.

Arguing means having two sides answering each other back and forth each attempting to encircle the other with their argument. Then consider the way the True Lord *the Most High* acknowledges human states and emotions, and legislates for things which are realistic and accepted. The pilgrimage removes a person from his homeland and the place where his family resides, and his wealth, and the things which he is accustomed to doing in life. When a person is removed in this way, people's manners might become somewhat strained because they are all living in unusual circumstances; some people have to sleep in rooms shared with people they do not know, and some families stay in a shared apartment with only one bathroom, and it might be that one person needs to answer the call of nature at the same time as someone else. When these kinds of things occur, people cannot always act

(1) Narrated by *Al-Bukhari, An-Nasa'i, Ibn Maja, and Ahmad* on the authority of *Abu Hurayra* God be pleased with him.

rationally, as they say, 'The one who withholds cannot be rational,' that is, the one who has a desperate need to answer the call of nature by urinating cannot be rational, and the same is the case for the one who is withholding his need to defecate because this is something which upsets a person's balance.

So, life for one in the pilgrimage is not normal, and the circumstances of the people are not normal, and so the True Lord *the Most High* warns us not to enter into arguments; for the discomfort caused by the changes to life's usual order might be a cause for people to behave poorly with others, and the True Lord *the Most High* wants to prevent this discomfort from spoiling our relationships with others. Experience has shown that those who go to the pilgrimage in a group either have great love for one another upon their return, or else end up as bitter enemies.

And so the True Lord *the Most High* wants from everyone to patiently bear the things he sees others do whilst on the pilgrimage, and to take account of how they have been removed from their usual habits and routines and from the comfort of their families; they should be willing to bear this for God's sake, and be engaged with the comfort of God, and to bear everything while by His side – and it is enough that one is in the House of God and in His hospitality.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...And whatever good you do, God knows it. And take provisions, but indeed, the best provision is fear of God....' After issuing to us a prohibition by saying, '...no lewd speech and no transgression and no wrangling during Pilgrimage...' – and these are negative things and actions which one must abstain from; and here the True Lord *the Most High* follows these negative actions by commanding positive actions, actions of good which God has knowledge of.

God *the Most High* wants us, in our worship, to combine two things, to act both negatively and positively: the negative aspect is to abstain from those things He called lewd speech, transgression, and wrangling; and He wants us to be positive and to do something good: '...And whatever good you do, God knows it....' What is this good? It means those things which are in direct contrast with the things He prohibited. If a person cannot engage in lewd matters whilst on the pilgrimage, this means that he must be chaste in his speech, and his looks, and his behaviour, and his relations with his lawful

wife, abstaining from these things as long as he is in a state of consecration; and He asks him to do the opposite of wickedness by doing things which are pious and good.

As for wrangling, we find that the opposite of this is to speak with gentleness, good manners, and softness, and to be sweet-natured and kind to others. This is the meaning of His words ‘...And whatever good you do, God knows it...’

The word ‘whatever’ in the phrase ‘whatever good’ is a starting-point, as though God *the Most High* wants you to do something good, and He *the Exalted* sees even the smallest amount of good, which is why He *the Exalted* said, ‘...God knows it...’ It is as though it is a good, which no person can see; for obvious good can be seen by all people. The expression ‘God knows it’ means that any kind of good, however small, and however little, is known to God. Many kinds of good are no more than intentions; and God rewards goodness according to what it merits.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...And take provisions....’ Provisions mean those things which a traveller takes with him to sustain him on his journey, and this was something that the Arabs had been accustomed to doing for a long time because there would not be any food at the places they would go to. All of these circumstances have changed in our time, as have the habits of the people who go to such places. In the past, people used to go to the pilgrimage carrying their burial shrouds with them, and salt for their food, and needles and thread, as there was not enough in Mecca and Medina to suffice all the people. Nowadays, people go there in order to buy luxury items, and it is not strange to find people coming back from the pilgrimage bringing all kinds of things with them. It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* made all this as a sign of what He foretold long ago when the valley was bereft of agriculture, saying that He has established the House as a sanctuary to which are brought the fruits of all things as provision from Him (*al-Qasas*: 57).

Look at the precision of the Quranic discourse: the word *yujba* (‘are brought’) means to be taken with force, not by the will of those who bring it, as though those who bring all of these different fruits to that place are compelled to bring them there; and it is provision sent from God, not from the hands of the people. This is a confirmation of Abraham’s prayer as read in the

Quran, asking God to provide for his family that he left in that valley and their descendents from the fruits (*Ibrahim*: 37).

God's command *wa tazawwadu* ('...And take provisions...'), as we know, is derived from the word (*ziyada*, 'increase'), and 'provision' (*zad*) means the food of the traveller. When someone stores something for a journey which is above and beyond what he will consume on his stay, he does this so that he will not have to endure the burden of begging or take recourse in begging; for the pilgrimage is an act of humble servanthood, and God *the Most High* wants humble servanthood to be for Him alone. If someone does not have provisions for his journey he might humble himself before someone else and ask him to give him food, and God does not want the pilgrim to humble himself for anyone.

This is why He asks him to take provisions according to his needs so that he will be able to suffice himself, and his humility will remain solely for his Lord, and he will not ask of anyone but his Lord, and will not need to take recourse in asking of his fellow men. He who asks of others or begs others thereby takes something of the humility which should have been, on this journey, solely for God, and directs it to other people, whilst God wants it to be for Him alone.

And if people do not give to the one who asks or begs, he might steal or pilfer what he needs, and his journey will change from an intention of piety to one of evil. Some of the Yemenites used to go out to the pilgrimage without any provisions and say, 'We depend on God; if we go to the House of God, will He not feed us?', and then circumstances forced them to steal. This is the reason why stealing and pilfering occur at the pilgrimage; the urgency of hunger can make someone steal and pilfer to get what he needs.

Because of this, the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to cut the human soul off from this evil, and so He said, '...and take provisions....' This is a command from God to take provisions for this journey in which a person is removed from his wealth, his family, his loved ones, and his routines. He *the Exalted* then says, '...but indeed, the best provision is fear of God....' We know that provisions are those things by which you protect yourself from hunger and thirst; and if provisions are good for preserving this temporary life of yours, what about the eternal life which never ends – does it not require a

greater provision? Making provisions for temporary journeys teaches you to make provisions for the eternal journey.

So, His words ‘...but indeed, the best provision is fear of God...’ include the provisions of this world and the Hereafter. God *the Most High* uses concrete things to remind us, and take us from them to abstract concepts; but if you reflect deeply, sincerely and truthfully, you will find that abstract concepts are even more powerful than concrete matters. This is why we notice that He *the Exalted* reminds the children of Adam that He has bestowed upon them garments to cover their nakedness (*al-A‘raf*: 26). This is a concrete matter, and then He *the Exalted* tells us more by saying that He bestowed garments as a thing of beauty and adornment. He *the Exalted* does not only cover our nakedness, but He also elevated the matter to the luxuries by which we adorn ourselves, and these luxuries are things of beauty, i.e. those things by which a person adorns himself. Then the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...the best provision is fear of God...’ That is, ‘I have blessed you with garments and things of beauty, but there is something which is better than either, namely the garment of God-fearing (*al-A‘raf*: 26). If you think that your physical clothes conceal your nakedness and protect you from heat and cold, and you adorn yourself with its beauty, understand that this is a concrete concept; but the superior matter is the garment of God-fearing. Why? Because to be exposed in the Hereafter, is worse than being exposed in this world.

So, His words ‘...And take provisions, but indeed, the best provision is fear of God. And fear Me, o men of understanding’ mean that the True Lord *the Most High* wants you to take provisions for the journey to save you the need to ask or beg, or to steal or snatch; and beware of doing anything that God has forbidden, but rather, for you to make provisions is part of the sphere of ‘...And fear Me, o men of understanding,’ that is, those of you who have minds. God does not alert the people to the minds they possess unless He wants them to use their minds to judge things because He *the Exalted* wants you to use your mind; and if you use your mind judging the matter, the judgement of the mind will be in line with God’s Command.

Since God *the Most High*, out of His kindness and mercy, wants people to cooperate in this holy rite and this blessed journey, He gave permission for

one group of pilgrims to serve the others in order to make things easier for them. It is amazing that God gives a dispensation to those who serve the pilgrims that they can leave before the others because this is a necessary task. Suppose that everyone refused to serve others, who would see to the needs of the people? Therefore, it is necessary that some people go with the task of working to serve the pilgrims; and God *the Most High* clarifies and explains this by saying:

لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ أَنْ تَبْتَغُوا فَضْلًا مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَإِذَا
أَفَضْتُمْ مِنْ عَرَفَاتٍ فَادْكُرُوا اللَّهَ عِنْدَ الْمَشْعَرِ الْحَرَامِ
وَأَذْكُرُوهُ كَمَا هَدَيْتُمْ وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ لَمَنِ الضَّالِّينَ ﴿١٩٨﴾

**but it is no offence to seek some bounty from your Lord.
When you surge down from Arafat remember God at the
sacred place. Remember Him: He has guided you. Before
that you were astray [198] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 198)**

‘There is no blame upon you...’ meaning that you will be doing no wrong ‘...for seeking bounty from your Lord [during *Hajj*]...’ i.e. if you make profits during the pilgrimage when it is a religious rite; and the gains made therein will be considered bounty from God. In the past, they used to say, ‘There is the *Hajj* (the pilgrim), and then there is the *dajj*’, one word beginning with ‘h’ and the other with ‘d’. The *dajj* is the one who goes to the sacred lands solely in order to trade. We say to him: There is nothing wrong with going to the pilgrimage and trading there because you are helping others by doing this; for if we forbade him, who would look after the needs of the pilgrims?

Why did the True Lord *the Most High* say, ‘...seeking bounty from your Lord...’ rather than ‘seeking provision of sustenance’? The True Lord *the Most High* has explained in the previous verse that you should not go without taking provisions with you, and so you are not intending to gain sustenance by doing this work. That is, you are not going to the pilgrimage in order to eat from the fruit of your business, but rather, you go taking your provisions with you, and the profit you make is extraneous to your needs, and is a bounty from God *the Most High*. He *the Exalted* wants that there be no impediment to your doing

lawful work there, and so He negated that it would be blameworthy to do so. You have come bringing with you your food and drink, and it suffices you to make a reasonable profit without any suspicion of wrongdoing such as exploiting the needs of the pilgrims; so, He called it a ‘bounty’, implying something extraneous to one’s needs.

Whenever sustenance and bounty are sought, the one who seeks sustenance and bounty should not be heedless; for all come from God. Be careful not to say that they come from the power of means, or from intelligence, or caution; they do not come from any of these things, for all sustenance is from God, and is a bounty from God. There is nothing wrong with seeking bounty from the Lord because He is the Creator and the Sustainer, and we are in His care, and so there is no shame in seeking bounty from God.

We need to have a closer look at a word used in this verse. For the departure of the pilgrims from Mount Arafat the True lord uses the word *afadtum* (rendered here as ‘depart’), derived from *fada* (‘overflow’). The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...But when you depart from *Arafat*, remember God at *Al-Mash'ar Al-Haram* (the holy site)....’ When you overfill a glass, the excess liquid pours over (*tufid*) its sides, so, the word *fa'id* means something which breaks away from something else because it is too much.

The words ‘...But when you depart from *Arafat*...’ (where the verb for ‘depart’ is *tufid*) indicate that God had willed that *Arafat* would be completely filled to overflow so that, whenever people left it they would be like the overspill from the number of people who can fill it at one time. This was a decree of God concerning the pilgrimage; and if you witness this scene – may God grant this to all believers, God willing – you will see this for yourself; it is as though a vessel has filled up, and all of this is overflowing from it, and you cannot tell where the pilgrims have come from, and nor where they are going; and he who sees the people circumambulating the *Ka'ba* will think they are a human block. Likewise, when the pilgrims surge forth in the afternoon of the Day of *Arafat*, it seems to you when you look at them that they cannot be individually distinguished. In describing a similar scene, a poet once said:

The people of the district poured upon him when he called them,
The faces of his companions were like so many coins.

And another said:

When we finished everything at Mina,

And those who wished to lay their hands on the pillars did so,

We began to converse with one another,

And the valley overflowed with necks of mounted steeds.

That is, as though they were flowing liquid. This is exactly what the surging flow of people from *Arafat* is like. And when we look at the people heading for Muzdalifa, you wonder with amazement, 'Where did all these people come from?' you see the valley with people and vehicles moving through it as though they are flowing liquid, and you cannot tell one person out of the throng. During the movements of the pilgrims, there are two occasions where there is a surge: the surge from *Arafat*, and then a second surge which the next verse clarifies, when He *the Exalted* says:

ثُمَّ أَفِضُوا مِنْ حَيْثُ أَفَاضَ النَّاسُ وَاسْتَغْفِرُوا
 اللَّهُ إِنَّكَ اللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

**Surge down where the rest of the people do, and ask
 forgiveness of God: He is most forgiving and merciful [199]
 (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 199)**

Mount Arafat is known by two different names: sometimes we call it 'Arafat' as is the case in this verse, and sometimes we call it 'Arafa', as when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The pilgrimage is *Arafa*.'⁽¹⁾ The word *Arafat* is a plural form, whilst *Arafa* is singular.

This word has become the name for the spacious area where the pilgrims gather on the ninth day of *Dhu Al-Hijja*. Do not think that it means the mountain; if you hear 'Mount Arafat', as the people say understand that this means the mountain which is associated with *Arafat*, not *Arafat* itself. This is why there are many people who imagine that if they do not climb the mountain

(1) Narrated by Ahmad, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nasa'i, Ibn Maja, Al-Hakim, and Al-Bayhaqi.

called *Jabal Al-Rahma* ‘Mount of Mercy’ which stands at the rocks where the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* stood at the Farewell Pilgrimage, it is as though they have not made the pilgrimage. We say to them: No, the standing should be made in the valley, and we call the mountain which stands next to the valley ‘Mount Arafat’; the mountain so is named after *Arafat*; the valley is not named after the mountain.

There have been many different explanations given for the origin of the word Arafat. There is a difference between a word being an adjective and then becoming a proper noun, and its being a proper name from the beginning. We said before that if the name was given as a proper noun right from the start, it does not necessarily have any particular meaning; a miserable person might be named ‘*Sa‘id*’ (‘happy’), or an ugly black girl might be called ‘*Qamar*’ (‘moon’); they have not been named in order to describe them, but rather to give them an identifying name; keeping in mind that when people give names, they do so out of optimism, so, they say, ‘I named my son *Sa‘id* because I hope he will be happy.’ And if you have a girl, you might give her a name which is different from her actual state, so, if she is unattractive you call her ‘*Jamila*’ (‘beautiful’) to be optimistic with her name. In this case, the name is adopted for optimistic reasons; and when the Arabs gave names, they would be optimistic in doing so. For example, they might call a boy ‘*Sakhr*’ (‘rock’) in order to be optimistic about him in the face of the enemy, or call him ‘*Kalb*’ (‘dog’) so that no one would dare to bother him.

It was once said to an Arab, ‘You give nice names to your servants, calling them ‘*Sa‘id*’ (‘happy’), ‘*Sa‘d*’ (‘bliss’), and ‘*Fadl*’ (‘bounty’), yet you give bad names to your own sons, calling them ‘*Murra*’ (‘bitterness’), ‘*Kalb*’ (‘dog’), and ‘*Sakhr*’ (‘rock’).’ The Arab replied, ‘Yes, because we name our sons with our enemies in mind so that they will be worried by them, and we name our servants for ourselves.’ The word Arafat (from an Arabic word meaning recognition) is now a name for a place, but there is a difference of opinion about the origin of this name. One explanation says that it is because Adam *peace be upon him* came down to earth at one place and Eve *peace be upon her* at another, and they each searched for the other until they met in this place, and so it was called ‘*Arafat*’ (meaning ‘recognition’).

The story about Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* requires us to look for a reason why they should have been separated so that they had to look for each other: if God created them to be a couple, why would He separate them? You can imagine the state of Adam *peace be upon him*, a being in a huge, strange world all alone, looking around and not finding any other human being like himself: By God, would he not long for someone to relieve his loneliness?

What would his state be upon seeing another person? There is no doubt that he would receive them very affectionately. For this reason, God separated them and made each of them search for someone to relieve their loneliness. If they had remained at each other's side, perhaps things would have been mundane; God wanted both Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* to long for each other, and so He placed them far away from each other and allowed them to be reunited after this long separation, and they longed to be reunited. And after the reunion, there would be love, mercy, comfort and peace, and this is what the life of a married couple should be.

There is another explanation for the naming of *Arafat*, which is that the angels said to our master Adam *peace be upon him* when he was in that place, 'Recognise (*i'rif*) your sin, and repent to your Lord,' whereupon he prayed to his Lord that they had sinned against themselves – and unless He grants them forgiveness and bestow His Mercy upon them, they shall most certainly be lost (*al-A'raf*: 23). In this case, he recognised his mistake, and he knew how to repent.

In still another explanation, the case may be that God wanted to teach Abraham *peace be upon him* when he prayed to his Lord to make the souls and hearts of people desire and incline towards this place. Abraham *peace be upon him* had a vision in his sleep in which he sacrificed his son; and this was something difficult in three ways: the first difficulty was that it was a vision, not revelation; the second difficulty was that he was his only son; and the third difficulty was that he was the one who would sacrifice him with his own hands.

These were three difficulties, and it is inconceivable that such a thing could have been simple and easy for the Father of the Prophets *peace be upon him* to do, but rather, it must have caused him a great deal of inner turmoil: was it a true vision, or what? This is why the day before the *Day of Arafat* is known as the 'Day of Visioning.' When our master Abraham *peace be upon him*

became certain that the visions of the Prophets are true, he realised that he had to carry on what he had seen; and the place in which he realised (Arabic '*arafa*') the Truth of the vision was named *Arafa*. Or, it may be that when the vision to sacrifice his son came to him, Satan would not let such an opportunity pass him by, and he had to intervene and whisper his insinuations to Abraham *peace be upon him*. Did he not threaten that he will most certainly lie in ambush for people all along God's straight way (*al-A'raf*: 16)?

And when Satan appeared to Abraham *peace be upon him* the first time, he pelted him with seven pebbles, and then he came back, so, he pelted him with seven more, and then, he came back a third time and he pelted him with seven more, and after that, he did not come back again, and Abraham *peace be upon him* ran away in haste out of fear that he would meet him again, and so the place was named 'Muzdalifa', as *muzdalif* means 'one who hurries;' and it is also called *Dhu Al-Majaz*, 'The One who Crossed.' i.e. he crossed though Muzdalifa, and recognised ('*arafa*') the truth of the matter at *Arafa*.

Or, it may be that Gabriel *peace be upon him* would teach (in Arabic '*arrafa*') him the rites at this place, and say to him, 'Do you see?' (in Arabic '*arafa*'), and Abraham *peace be upon him* would reply 'I see' ('*arafa*'). Or, it may be that a person recognises (in Arabic '*arafa*') his Lord upon completing the final pillar He has ordained for him; we all recognise the Pillars (of faith): this one recognises, and that one, and a third, and a fourth.... So we are all a plurality of recognition ('*arafa*'), and the place becomes centred on servanthood to God in which all the pilgrims share.

'...But when you depart from Arafat, remember God at Al-Mash'ar Al-Haram (the holy site)...' (*al-Baqara*: 198). The holy site is Muzdalifa. And 'remember God' means: God has made this difficult journey easy for you, and has brought you safe and sound to God's Sacred Mosque (*Ka'ba*); and then you return home with your sins forgiven, which is something that merits that you remember God with thanks and gratitude.

'...And remember Him, as He has guided you...' (*al-Baqara*: 198). This is because His guidance for you and His teaching you the nearest way to reach goodness was a greeting from God to His creatures; and greetings must be returned; so, as He guided you, remember Him. Then God *the Most High* says,

‘...for indeed, you were before that among those went astray’ (*al-Baqara*: 198). This is because Arabs used to make many pilgrimages in the time of pagan ignorance, and these pilgrimages were based on misguidance, whilst now your pilgrimage in Islam is rightly-guided.

Coming back to the verse under discussion, ‘Then depart from the place from where [all] the people depart...’ The word ‘then’ (*thumma*) indicates that one must stand at *Arafa*, or spend the night at Muzdalifa because the word *thumma* in Arabic indicates a progression which is slow and delayed.

So, the words ‘Then depart...’ support the argument of those who say that one must spend the night at Muzdalifa. This verse was revealed because Quraysh saw themselves as being the people of the Sanctuary so that they were never required to do the things which other people were required to do, and therefore they would not go with the people to *Arafat*. God wants that all people be equal at the pilgrimage, which is why the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said at the Farewell Pilgrimage, ‘You are all the children of Adam, and Adam was created from dust; let people stop taking pride in their forefathers, lest they be lower in God’s sight than dung beetles.’⁽¹⁾ And God *the Most High* wanted to do away with this custom of Quraysh, and He said, ‘Then depart from the place from where [all] the people depart...’ that is, there is no special distinction for you, and no difference between one Muslim and another.

Some exegetes say that the expression ‘...where [all] the people depart...’ means the way that Abraham *peace be upon him* departed, i.e. that our master Abraham *peace be upon him* had set all the rites of the pilgrimage after God *the Most High* had taught them to him. In this case, although the word ‘people’ (*nas*) is a plural, here it refers to Abraham *peace be upon him*. Do not find it strange that the word ‘people’ could be used to refer to Abraham since God also described him as being a ‘nation’ (*ummah*). The word ‘people’ can be used to describe a person who embodies many different qualities, and we find the word ‘people’ used in a Quranic verse to refer to our master the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* where God speaks about the disbelievers

(1) Narrated by Al-Bazzar on the authority of Hudhayfa. The dung beetle (*ja‘lan*) is a kind of lowly insect.

who envied ‘people’ (in this case the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*) for what God has granted them out of His favour (*an-Nisa’*: 54). The True Lord *the Most High* used the word ‘people’ to refer to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*. And we find this usage in another instance: when a man went to the believers to forewarn them that the idolaters were gathering to fight them, God referred to this man as people (*Al-‘Imran*: 173). He was one man, but God *the Most High* referred to him as ‘people’, as though by the warning he gave to the Muslims, he had combined all the attributes of goodness that people have.

The verse concludes with ‘...and ask forgiveness of God. Indeed, God is Forgiving and Merciful.’ The True Lord *the Most High* knows that the children of Adam *peace be upon him* cannot fulfil His rights as they should be fulfilled, and that they will surely miss out on certain things. He *the Exalted* knows this because He is their Creator, and so He commanded them – in His infinite wisdom – to seek forgiveness of Him, in order that, He expunges their sins.

فَإِذَا قَضَيْتُمْ مَنَاسِكَكُمْ فَاذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ كَذِكْرِكُمْ
 آبَاءَكُمْ أَوْ أَشَدَّ ذِكْرًا فَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَقُولُ رَبَّنَا
 آتِنَا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَمَا لَهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنْ خَلْقٍ ﴿٢٠٠﴾

When you have completed your rites, remember God as much as you remember your own fathers, or even more. There are some who pray, ‘Our Lord, give us good in this world,’ and they will have no share in the Hereafter [200] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 200)

We know that the word *qada* (rendered here as ‘performed’) has various meanings, and that the central concept of all these meanings is ‘to finish something with decisiveness.’ Something might be finished with decisiveness because its performance has been completed: ‘And when you have completed...’ i.e. when you have done your rites. This is one meaning. It can also be because you have finished the matter with a decisive statement, as is the case with God’s by ordaining to us that we shall worship none but Him (*al-Isra’*: 23).

The meaning of *qada* might also be 'to give a decisive judgement / verdict' as when a judge (*qadi*) gives a verdict (*qada*). So all of these meanings revolve around the notion of finishing work with wisdom and decisiveness. 'And when you have completed your devotions, remember God....' That is, when you finish your devotions (*manasik*), and the word *manasik* (plural of *mansak*) literally means the places where worship is offered; *Arafat* is the place of the standing, and Muzdalifa is the location of the holy site where the pilgrims spend the night, and Mina is also a place to spend the night; so, every place where worship is offered is called a *mansak*.

God *the Most High* says, 'remember God,' that is, the remembrance of God continues to be mentioned in these verses, as though, if you are given the felicity to perform some act of worship, beware of being deluded; but rather remember your Lord, who ordained it for you and then gave you the felicity to do it, and aided you. It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to make an end to the things which the Arabs had become used to at that time; in the past they used to go on the pilgrimage, and when the tribes gathered in Mina, every tribe would stand with its poet or orator so that he could enumerate his virtues and the virtues of his forefathers, and the proud achievements of the time of pagan ignorance, and they would pay blood indemnities, settle scores, serve food and engage in other customs besides these. God *the Most High* wanted them to cease these customs which were based on pride in forebears and their deeds, and so He said, '...remember God like your remembrance of your fathers....' To bear something in mind means to direct one's thoughts to something which is not present at the time you invoke it. One cannot remember past events apart from those things which had some kind of positive effect on him, and the intensity of remembrance is accordant with the strength of the positive effect which it had.

In the past they would serve food, and those who serve food are fulfilling an important role in such a barren place as this. The exaggeration in the size of the bowls of food was such that some of them, like Al-Mut'im ibn 'Adiyy, had a bowl so big that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said that you could find shade under it at midday. A bowl is a container in which food is placed, so, can you imagine how big this bowl would have been?

And they would settle scores, meaning that if one tribe had attacked another and killed many people, a man of nobility, manliness, valour and decency from amongst them would take the responsibility of all this upon himself by paying indemnities; and if someone from their tribe had killed someone and could not afford to pay the indemnity, the people of valour would volunteer to pay it for them; and all of these actions were about competing for pride and glory.

The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to turn them towards Himself in all things, and it is as if He was saying to them: You make remembrance of your forefathers because they used to do such-and-such, and your forefathers were proud of their own forefathers; go further back, and follow the chain back to the Creator of all fathers and all men; all the good that came at the hands of the forefathers ultimately goes back to God. Therefore, if you remember your forefathers for the good things they did, remember the One Who gave them the ability to do this good.

He wanted them to remember God *the Most High* as they remembered their own forefathers, or with a keener remembrance; for every being only deserves to be remembered for the good he has done, and there is no goodness except from God; and so we must remember God.

Furthermore, Islam wanted to end the practice of seeking pride and glory in one's forefathers and make glory a matter for the individual self of the believer, that is, glory based on good, honourable works which are achieved by the person himself. This is why they say about those who have pride in their ancestors that they are *'izhamiyyun*, derived from the word *'izham*, meaning 'bones', because they associate themselves with glories which were achieved by those who are now bones buried in graves. God wants us to have our own intrinsic glory so that we are proud of the things we do ourselves not what our forefathers did; for our forefathers have already moved on to what they sent ahead. God wants a person to have his own identity of faith and responsibility, and if someone wants to be proud he should be proud of himself. This is why a poet said:

Do not ascribe yourselves to bones, being proud

Of a glorious past, but living in a ruined present;

Nobility inherited from the past does no good

Save for those who are eager to maintain this nobility.

If a branch bears no fruit, no matter how high it stands

People will see it as nothing but firewood.

If a plant does not bear fruit, people consider it to be nothing but firewood. The True Lord *the Most High* wants to awaken in the believer an active identity, not an identity which takes pride in what happened in the past; rather, everyone should do something to be proud of:

The true youth is not the one who says, 'That was my father,'

But rather the one who says, 'Here I am!'

When the Arabs competed with one another in prideful boasting, one would say to the other: 'Brother, what do you have to be proud of that I do not?'

The other would reply, 'I take pride in my fathers and grandfather!'

The first would then say, 'Be well aware that the glory of your forebears has ended with you, whilst the glory of my forebears has begun with me! Why should it not be a source of pride for my forebears that they produced me?'

Someone said about this:

They say Abu Saqr is from Shaiban, but I say:

No, by my life, Shaiban is from Abu Saqr!

Many a father has been exalted by their progeny,

Just as the tribe of 'Adnan was exalted by God's Messenger!

As long as people take pride in someone who is still alive amongst them, they thereby cleave to one who can give them support so that they will be something enduring and influential in existence, not only by means of that limited example of serving food, settling scores, and paying indemnities, but rather by bearing the message of global humanity.

'And when you have completed your devotions, remember God like your remembrance of your fathers or with yet more intense remembrance....' This is because your remembrance of God *the Most High* will connect you to the

support which comes from Him, and will give you the assistance you need to be a people who will lead the motions of life on earth, establishing therein security, peace, mercy and justice; and this is what you should be proud of.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* draws our attention to the fact that when a person finishes with his acts of worship, he becomes worthy to beseech God, and ask God for those things which he wants to ask. Asking of God differs according to the different aspirations of those who ask; they used to only ask God by saying, ‘O Lord, give me camels, O Lord, give me sheep, O Lord, give me cows, O Lord, give me an orchard; O Lord, as you gave to my father, give to me!’

Nothing was on their minds except material things, and God wanted them to rise up to a higher level when asking of Him, and to aspire to something more lasting, permanent and beneficial. From here comes the distinction of faith: if you are only going to ask God *the Most High* for the enjoyable things of this world, what is the difference between you and the people of pagan ignorance? This is what we understand from God’s words at the end of the verse: ‘...And among the people is he who says, ‘Our Lord, give us in this world,’ and he will have in the Hereafter no share.’ When the servant completes his acts of worship for God, he finds himself worthy to ask God; and as long as you find yourself worthy to ask God, ask God for an everlasting good; for a person only raises his need with someone according to the position and rank of the one he asks. You might go to a person and ask him for ten pence, and go to another who is richer than him and ask for a pound, and then, go to a third and ask him for twenty pounds; you ask according to the readiness of each of them to meet your request.

So, as long as, after completing their acts of worship, the servants are in a position to ask of God, they should elevate their request to God and ask him for something which is eternally beneficial, and they should not lower their request by asking for purely worldly, limited, things.

‘...And among the people is he who says, ‘Our Lord, give us in this world,’ and he will have in the Hereafter no share.’ The servant might not want anything from his supplication to God but worldly matters, and so shall have no portion or share of the Hereafter; and this kind of person has poor

aspirations because he is asking for the things of this passing life. God wants us to elevate our faithful aspirations, which is why He continues by saying:

وَمِنْهُمْ مَّنْ يَقُولُ رَبَّنَا آتِنَا فِي الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَفِي
 الْآخِرَةِ حَسَنَةً وَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ ﴿٢٠١﴾

**others pray, ‘Our Lord, give us good in this world and
 in the Hereafter, and protect us from the torment of
 the Fire’ [201] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 201)**

Why are we not told to forget about this worldly life here? It is because this life is the farming ground for the Hereafter. Scholars have differed concerning what is meant by the words ‘...give us in this world [that which is] good....’ Some of them narrowing it and saying that the good of this world is a righteous wife, and that the good of the Hereafter is paradise. Some of them say that the good of this world is knowledge because action is based upon it, and that the good of the Hereafter is forgiveness as this is the believer’s ultimate wish.


By examining all the statements of the scholars, we find that they are in agreement that the good of the Hereafter is that which leads to paradise, forgiveness and mercy. I say: Why should we not make the good of this world more comprehensive and wide-ranging by praying, ‘O Lord, grant us everything which makes this life good for Your servant in Your service.’

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by the prayer, ‘...and protect us from the torment of the Fire.’ When He *the Exalted* grants blessings to His servants, He blesses them by sparing them torment of the hellfire and admitting them into paradise. It looks as though, being spared the torment of Hell is a blessing in itself. And if one is admitted into paradise, after having been spared Hell, it is as though He has been bestowed upon by two blessings; for God *the Most High* addresses mankind saying that every one of them will come within sight of Hell (*Maryam*: 71).

This means that everyone will see the hellfire. A believer will see it on his way to paradise where he will say, ‘Praise be to God, faith saved me from this fire and its torment;’ so, when he sees the fire and its horrific sight, he will

praise God for the blessing of Islam which saved him from the hellfire, and when he enters paradise and sees its blessings, he will praise God a second time. Likewise, the people of *al-A'raf* the heights, i.e. those who are neither in Hell nor in paradise, will see the hellfire. The True Lord *the Most High* says that whoever is drawn away from the fire and admitted into paradise will indeed have won (*Al-Imran*: 185).

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:


 أُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا كَسَبُوا وَاللَّهُ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ

**They will have the share they have worked
 for: God is swift in reckoning [202]
 (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 202)**

A 'share' means a portion; as for '...of what they have earned....' We already know that in Arabic there are the verbs *kasaba* and *iktasaba*, both meaning to earn; but *iktasaba* implies some affectation or additional effort, whilst *kasaba* refers to ordinary or normal actions, which is why you find that *iktasaba* always applies to evil actions, as though the one who does evil thereby burdens himself, whereas to do good is a natural thing for a person to do. The meaning of '...of what they have earned...' here is that which they have earned *kasaba* from accomplishing the actions they have performed on the pilgrimage, namely consecration, the *talbiya* (supplication on answering God's call for pilgrimage), the circumambulation of the *Ka'ba*, the running between As-Safa and Al-Marwa, the journey to Mina, the journey to *Arafat* and standing there, the surging forth to Muzdalifa, the pelting of the pillars at Mina, and the final circumambulation; and all of this is a gain for the one who has attained the honour of the pilgrimage.

When we read '...And God is swift in reckoning,' we should understand that swiftness means for an action to take place in a short period of time; so, instead of an action taking one hour for you to do, you might finish it in half an hour. Every action takes time, and when an action takes time and you want to reduce the time it takes, you must do it swiftly so you finish it in the shortest time possible, and reducing time requires swift movement when

acting. This is the case for actions which requires effort and human actions; but God *the Most High* acts by just saying 'Be!', and His actions do not require any endeavour, just as they do not require any time. And so He is swift in reckoning because He does not require any time, and because nothing keeps Him from anything else. This is the difference between the power of the One *the Exalted* and the power of contingent beings; for when a contingent being performs an action, this action prevents him from doing any other action, and he cannot do two things at once. But as for the One and Only, no action keeps Him from any other; moreover, He does what He wants, when He wants, and for whomever He wants.

Therefore, when Imam 'Ali ibn Abu Talib *God be pleased with him* was asked, 'How can God make account for all beings at the same time?' he replied, 'In the same way He provides for them all at the same time.' He *the Exalted* is the One who provides for them, and just as He provides for them He will make account for them.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَأَذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ فِي أَيَّامٍ مَعْدُودَاتٍ فَمَنْ تَعَجَّلَ فِي يَوْمَيْنِ فَلَا إِثْمَ عَلَيْهِ وَمَنْ
تَأَخَّرَ فَلَا إِثْمَ عَلَيْهِ لِمَنِ اتَّقَىٰ وَآتَقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّكُمْ إِلَيْهِ تُحْشَرُونَ ﴿٢٠٣﴾

Remember God on the appointed days. If anyone is in a hurry to leave after two days, there is no blame on him, nor is there any blame on anyone who stays on, so long as they are mindful of God. Be mindful of God, and remember that you will be gathered to Him [203] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 203)

We can observe here that the remembrance of God *the Most High* is something which pervades all the rites; and '...during the appointed days...' mean the days of *Tashriq* (the three days following the *Eid*). We spend the ninth day at *Arafa*, and then, we spend the eve of the tenth day at Muzdalifa, and then after this, we surge forth where the people surge forth, and we go to stone the pillars of Aqaba, and some go to perform the farewell circumambulation of the *Ka'ba* and end their rites, or they might go to perform the sacrifice and come partially out of consecration (*ihram*) if he does not have his wife with

him, or else if he has performed the circumambulation, then, he comes completely out of consecration. As for the appointed days, these are the days of *Tashriq*, the three days after the Day of the Sacrifice. The name *Tashriq* derives from *shuruq* (sunrise). In the past, when they made their sacrifices they would take the meat and put it in the sun, exposing it to sunrays to preserve it, and this is why the days became known as the days of *Tashriq*. When we hear God's words '...during the appointed days...' we understand that this means more than two days.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...then whoever hastens [his departure] in two days, there is no sin upon him; and whoever delays [until the third], there is no sin upon him - for him who fears God....' The fact that the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...during the appointed days...' and then says, '...then whoever hastens [his departure] in two days...' indicates that the word 'days' means a plural consisting of more than two days, namely three days; but the True Lord *the Most High* made it so that staying for two days is akin in value to staying for three days so that if you hasten away within two days you will incur no sin, and if you complete three days you will also incur no sin. How can this be?

It is because it is not a question of time, but rather, it is about invoking an intention of worship. You might stay for three days but without invoking an intention of worship, and this is why He *the Exalted* said, '...for him who fears God....' Be careful not to judge actions by how long they take; rather, they are judged by the sincerity of the intention and the God-fearing that accompanies them.

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the noble verse by saying, '...And fear God and know that to Him you will be gathered.' He *the Exalted* uses the word 'gathered' because it fits the description of the throngs of the pilgrimage; for just as He gathered you in this great gathering, whilst you had a choice in the matter, He *the Exalted* is able to gather you without your having any choice in the matter. If you came by your own free will to this great human gathering at the pilgrimage, know that the One who commanded you to go by your own free will to participate in this huge assembly is able to bring you forth when your free will is taken from you. The True Lord *the Most High* says after this:

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يُعْجِبُكَ قَوْلُهُ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَيُشْهَدُ اللَّهُ عَلَى مَا
فِي قَلْبِهِ وَهُوَ أَلَدُّ الْخِصَامِ ﴿٢٠٤﴾ وَإِذَا تَوَلَّى سَعَى فِي الْأَرْضِ لِيُفْسِدَ
فِيهَا وَيُهْلِكَ الْحَرْثَ وَالنَّسْلَ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْفُسَادَ ﴿٢٠٥﴾

There is [a kind of] man whose views on the life of this world may please you [Prophet], he even calls on God to witness what is in his heart, yet he is the bitterest of opponents [204] When he leaves, he sets out to spread corruption in the land, destroying crops and livestock. God does not like corruption [205]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 204 - 205)

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to present to us a matter related to our existence, namely that every action has an outward appearance and an inner reality; and it is possible that you could make the outward appearance seem as it should be expected, whilst on the inside you are cheating the people. If some people have outer and inner sides with each other, it is for the good of a person that he and all other people ascribe themselves to be part of a world in which everyone knows that there is a Wise God who knows everything about us all.

If you are keeping back something which I do not know, and I am keeping back something which you do not know, how can things go well between us? Therefore, one of our life's essentials is that we all believe together in a God who is cognisant of all our secrets; and this is what will make us behave properly. This is why it is said, 'If you evade the justice of the world, you will not evade the justice of Heaven.'

This is why the justice of Heaven and God's knowledge of the unseen are matters which we should be grateful to Him for because He is the One who will protect each one of us from the others. When God conceals our secret thoughts from others, this is a blessing for which we should thank Him; for souls are fickle, and if you knew a passing thought that I had against you in my soul for a single moment, it might not please you, and you might never forget it and always feel bad about me; but transient thoughts and opinions come to you and to me, and then go again, and if all of us knew each other's secret thoughts, life would be unbearable. The popular saying regarding this goes: 'If only the

things you feel about one another were to be revealed, you would have left each other unburied after death.’

So, it is a mercy from God, and one of His greatest blessings to His creatures, that he conceals their secret thoughts from one another. The True Lord *the Most High* warns us of those whom He describes thus: ‘...And from among the people is one whose speech ... pleases you...,’ that is, those who display goodness which contradicts the evil they conceal inside. A poet depicted this situation by saying:

Every one of us scorns the other, yet out of fear

We act as though we all praise one another.

That is, if we were frank, we would all condemn one another, but we all praise one another when we meet, each one saying with his tongue what is not truly in his heart. Does the statement ‘...whose speech pleases you...’ mean that it is forbidden for you to be pleased with any speech? No; speech can please me, but not that connected with this worldly life. The discourse which pleases is that which is concerned with the eternal life of the Hereafter in order that we secure goodness from the One Who has dominion over all goodness.

It is bad enough for a person to hear someone praise him when they harbour hatred towards him in their hearts. This is enough proof of how the one being praised has been fooled; the one who praises him says to himself: ‘This fellow whom I am praising is a fool; I praise him and he takes my praise seriously!’ God *the Most High* is alerting us to the necessity of the Muslim being alert and vigilant so that if someone pleases us with speech about this worldly life, we should deem his speech to carry no good; for the best of speech is that which concerns those matters which are everlasting.

Therefore, when the Caliph of the Muslims wrote to Imam Ja‘far As-Sadiq saying, ‘Why do you not visit us as other people do?’, Imam Ja‘far as-Sadiq wrote back to the Caliph saying, ‘I have nothing in this world which I fear losing, and you have nothing of the Hereafter which I seek.’ It is as though he wanted to say to him: Leave us alone, for you need those who will sit before you and praise you, and you do not know that the first people to think ill of you, are the same ones who praise you. ‘And from among the people is one

whose speech concerning worldly life pleases you...' This verse was revealed concerning a person named Al-Akhnas ibn Shuraiq Ath-Thaqafi, whose real first name was Ubay, but who was given the nickname 'Akhnas' because he sneaked away (Arabic *khanasa*) and went home on the day of the Battle of Badr and did not fight against the Muslims with Quraysh making the excuse that the caravan had escaped from the Muslims and returned to them and there was no need to fight. When he met the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, he would claim to be a Muslim, and speak gently to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, and claim that he loved him; but when he left the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* he passed by crops and donkeys belonging to some Muslims and burned the crops and killed the donkeys. Although the verse was revealed about Al-Akhnas, it applies to all hypocrites.

'...and he calls God to witness as to what is in his heart, yet he is the fiercest of opponents.' Do not say 'God is my witness,' but rather bring your witnesses to testify that what you say is true; for the meaning of 'God is my witness' is that you are stating that God will testify for you, and you are lying about this, and you want to make your lies seem believable by bringing God into the matter.

When you hear someone say, 'As God is my witness, I am such-and-such,' say to him, 'This is a statement from you that God *the Most High* testifies, and you might be lying about this; and I would prefer if two people were to testify rather than for you do bring God into the matter.' God says, '...and he calls God to witness as to what is in his heart, yet, he is the fiercest of opponents.' The fierce opponent is the one who is wilful in his disobedience. If it is said that someone is a fierce opponent, it means that he is wilful in his antagonism and that he argues on the side of falsehood. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'The most abhorrent man in God's sight is the most contentious of adversaries.'⁽¹⁾

This means the one who argues on the side of falsehood and is harsh in his sinfulness, not only sinning, but also being harsh in his sin. Why is he the fiercest

(1) Narrated by *Al-Bukhari*, and 'the most contentious of adversaries' means the one who is severe in his antagonism.

of opponents? Because the one who opposes you head-on makes you cautious of him, whilst the one who greets you with hypocrisy is the one who seeks to deceive you, and this is extreme enmity. The open adversary is better because he confronts you with his heart on his sleeve; but if you confront the one who hides his enmity to you and acts as though he loves you, he will be very hard in his enmity because he wants to deceive you and plot against you.

‘And when he turns away, he strives throughout the land to cause corruption therein....’ The Arabic word *tawalla* (rendered here as ‘turn away’) means to leave; that is, he says things to you which please you, and when he turns away, he brings out what he had been concealing. The Arabic verb *tawalla* can have another meaning, giving the verse a different import. It may mean to take charge of something. In this case, the verse would mean that when the person in question is given responsibility of something, he wastes it and spreads corruption.

In the second reading of the verse ‘And when he turns away, he strives throughout the land to cause corruption therein and destroy tilth and progeny....’ the meaning has a wider scope. Without human interference, the earth was created in a state of soundness, and corruption is something which mankind introduced to it; and we know that corruption never afflicts anything without the interference of mankind.

Why do we undergo critical food shortages, but not critical air shortages? Because mankind has not interfered in the air; and it is according to man’s level of interference in things that they become corrupted. We have interfered with water a little, and so it has been corrupted, for we have not seen that it is transported well in good-quality pipes, and so it arrives to us in a polluted state, or contains too much, or too little chlorine. The level of the corruption is commensurate with the level of the human interference. In the past, however, one used to go to the direct source of the water in wells and take water in the natural state in which God created it, without any interference from man, and there was no pollution or anything else.

So, to the extent that man’s actions in life are not rightly-guided by faith in God, there will be corruption, and because of this, religious guidance needed to be issued to man. Other creatures apart from man do not have religious guidance, and are created with instincts, and they only fulfil their purpose.

Beasts of burden never refuse to allow people to mount them, and never refuse to carry their loads, or to be used for ploughing or irrigation; even when you slaughter them they do not resist you. Why? Because they are created to instinctively do beneficial things without having any choice in the matter; and if they ever refuse to do so, it is only because of some external matter such as illness.

But those who have free will must have religious guidance which says to them 'Do' and 'Do not'; if they adhere to this guidance of 'Do' and 'Do not' their lives will become balanced, and if they do not adhere to it their lives will be corrupted. This is what we understand from God's words 'And when he turns away, he strives throughout the land to cause corruption therein....' It is as though corruption is what requires effort: leave nature and created beings as they are, and you will find that they function with harmony and perfection, just as they should.

So, corruption comes from the one who lives without any religious guidance, because '...when he turns away, he strives throughout the land to cause corruption therein....' It is as though the original state of the earth and everything in it were in a state of soundness; and if you cannot make sound things better, do not try to corrupt them. God *the Most High* says, 'And if they are told, "Do not spread corruption on earth," they answer, "We are but improving things!" Verily, it is they, who are spreading corruption – but they perceive it not!' (*al-Baqara*: 11-12)

From this we understand that they were under the illusion that the earth needed their actions to improve it even though the earth was already sound; this is because they were not acting in accordance with God's guidance.

So, we understand from this verse that if a person *tawalla* (whether this means to turn away or to take charge of some authority), he goes about the earth to spread corruption therein; it is as though corruption on earth is something foreign to it which is caused by mankind not acting in accordance with God's guidance. As long as man has free will, he must have guidance which is higher than him to keep this free will sound; if he does not have any guidance, and follows his whims, he will inevitably cause corruption.

Look at the foolishness of the one who causes corruption on earth: does he think that he is the only one who has the right to benefit on earth so that he

can allow himself to corrupt the earth for others? He forgets the truth of matters; for just as he corrupts things for others, others will corrupt things for him, and so who loses? We all lose.

‘And when he turns away, he strives throughout the land to cause corruption therein and destroy tilth and progeny....’ The Arabic word *harth* (rendered here as ‘tilth’) may mean one of two things: sometimes it is used to mean ‘crops/cultivated land’, and other times it is used to mean ‘women’. The first meaning is found in the Quranic verse where God *the Most High* mentions David and Solomon when they gave judgement concerning the field into which some people’s sheep had strayed (*al-Anbiya*: 78). So the meaning of the word *harth* (‘field’) in this verse is crops, resulting from turning the land and tilling it. Your job, man, is to turn and till the earth, and to place the seeds which God created into the earth which God created, and to water them with the water which God created so that they grow into the air which God created. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* draws out attention to this when He asks mankind to consider the seed which they cast upon the soil; is it they who cause it to grow; or is it God (*al-Waqi’a*: 63-34).

The second meaning of *harth* is ‘women’ as bearers of progeny; and this is the meaning we find in God’s address to men that their wives are their tilth (*al-Baqara*: 223).

If the goal of tilling the earth is to produce crops, the case is similar with the woman, who bears children. The above quoted verse continues with telling men to go, then, to their tilth as they may desire (*al-Baqara*: 223). Licentious and promiscuous people want to understand that the verse makes it permissible to sexually penetrate a woman in any part of her body. We say to them: Notice that the verse says ‘your tilth’, and tilth is the place where germination occurs, and so penetration should be in the place of germination only. Do not understand it as a generalisation when actually it is a specification.

The True Lord *the Most High* continues the description of the one who speaks good words but spreads corruption in the earth, by saying, ‘...and destroy tilth and progeny....’ Progeny means offspring and descendants.

The True Lord *the Most High* then concludes the verse by saying, ‘...And God does not like corruption....’ That is, the True Lord *the Most High* wants

that if you do not intervene in things using the ability which God created for you to think and contribute, at least leave things the way God created them; for God does not love that you corrupt the things which He created to be inherently sound.

What this verse shows is only a single example of the different ways in which the Islamic call was received when it first began by those who hypocritically adopted it because it had acquired strength, coming up with statements and actions which pleased those who they deceived. We know that this hypocrisy was a sign of the strength of the Muslims, which is why hypocrisy did not begin in Mecca (where Muslims were weak and tyrannised), but rather in Medina; and the True Lord *the Most High* describes this situation saying that among the people of the Prophet's City there are such as have grown insolent in their hypocrisy (*at-Tawba*: 101).

One might wonder how this phenomenon could have emerged in the atmosphere of strong faith which prevailed in Medina at the time. We say: It was because Islam in Mecca had been weak, and no one seeks to deceitfully align himself with the weak, and then, Islam in Medina became strong, and people usually tend to flatter and align themselves with the strong side even if they do not share the same beliefs.

So, the existence of hypocrisy in Medina was a natural and healthy phenomenon which showed that the faith had become strong to the extent that people who were not truly Muslims would claim that they were. These people would say things which were good and pleasing, and they might do things in front of those whom they sought to deceive which pleased those who saw them or heard them; yet, they were not steadfast upon truth, and as soon as they turned away, that is, covered from the sight of those whom they sought to deceive, they would return to their true state of disbelief; or as soon as they were entrusted with some kind of power, they went about the earth spreading corruption.

The verse here exhibits something which shows the discernment of the believers. It exposes one of the hypocrites, and *Al-Akhnas* was one of the leaders of the hypocrites; and to expose a hypocrite in this way, shows that behind Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, and the believers in

Muhammad, is a Lord who informs them of what is being plotted against them; and it also alerts them of the essential need for them to have discernment, as is shown by the words of the True Lord *the Most High*:

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُ اتَّقِ اللَّهَ أَخَذَتْهُ الْعِزَّةُ بِالْإِثْمِ فَحَسْبُهُ جَهَنَّمُ وَلَيْسَ الْمِهَادُ

When he is told, ‘Beware of God,’ his arrogance leads him to sin. Hell is enough for him: a dreadful resting place [206]

(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 206)

It would not have been said to him, ‘Fear God,’ unless it was already known that he was a hypocrite; and as long as they said that to him, this shows that this hypocrisy did not escape their discernment. We understand from this verse that the believer is sagacious and discerning, and that he must consider things according to the criterion of mental alertness; he should not simply leave it up to Divine clarity to tell him what is going on, but rather, God wants every believer to have autonomy and sagacity.

‘And when it is said to him, “Fear God”....’ It is as though the image he presents when he speaks or acts is incompatible with God-fearing because it is a pleasing speech which is not in harmony with a displeasing inner state. It is true that he may pray in the first row and show enthusiasm for the affairs of the religion, and say nice things that please the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and please the believers, but his behaviour and speech come from a corrupt intention. The meaning of ‘Fear God’ is to make your outer appearance correspond to your inner intention; it is not enough that you utter pleasing speech, and it is not enough that you do things that please others, for God loves that speech be in harmony with action, and that the actions of the body be in harmony with the intentions of the heart.

So, the believer must have discernment, intelligence and composure, and observe the conduct of others; he must not accept outward appearances, nor the façade of speech and actions, where there is no harmony between actions and intentions; and he must not suffice himself with merely knowing this, but rather must tell the hypocrite the truth of what he sees so that the hypocrite will find his recourse to hypocrisy dwindling because when he says to him, ‘Fear God,’ the hypocrite will understand that his hypocrisy is uncovered, and

perhaps after this he will renounce his hypocrisy, and so this is a mercy from the believer to the hypocrite. If anyone sees, and notices with his intelligence, that someone is practising hypocrisy, he should say to him, 'Fear God', intending to expose his hypocrisy by saying this. If one person says to him, 'Fear God', and then, another person says to him, 'Fear God,' and then, a third, and then, a fourth, he will know with certainty that his hypocrisy has been uncovered, and that his speech no longer pleases people.

'And when it is said to him, "Fear God," pride in the sin takes hold of him....' The Arabic word *'izza* (rendered here as 'pride') has different meanings; it can also mean: self-esteem, honour, or glory. The linking of pride to sin in the verse indicates that there can be pride without sin; as long as God has said, '...pride in the sin takes hold of him...' there can therefore be pride (in the sense of self-esteem) without sin. Indeed, this kind of pride is a desirable attitude from the believer, and God *the Most High* decreed that *'izza* (honour) belongs to Him, to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, and to the believers in saying that all honour belongs to God, and to His Messenger and to the believers (*al-Munafiqun*: 8).

This pride in truth is not a sin; and what is the difference between taking pride in truth and taking pride in sin? Let us look to the Noble Quran to know the difference. The sorcerers of Pharaoh, as God *the Most High* relates, swore by Pharaoh's might (*'izza*) that they would prevail (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 44). This is pride in sin and falsehood. Likewise, God *the Most High* states that the disbelievers are absorbed in pride, and in contention (*Sad*: 2). This is also false pride.

On the other hand, God's exaltation of Himself, the Lord of Might and Glory, above what they may describe (*as-Saffat*: 180) is pride in truth. So this is true pride, pride in the Power which always prevails, and can never be prevailed upon. As for false pride, it is the pride of arrogance which is associated with sin and disobedience. The True Lord *the Most High* challenges everyone who takes this kind of pride in sin: If you truly had invincible power as you proudly boast, then no one would be able to overpower you; but look at Pharaoh's sorcerers, those who swore by Pharaoh's might that they would prevail (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 44), they were the ones who, at the end of the day, fell

in prostration before Moses *peace be upon him* and declared their belief in the Lord of all the worlds, the Lord of Moses and Aaron (*ash-Shu'ara*: 47-8).

Pride in the might of Pharaoh did not avail them at all because it was pride in sin; pride in truth came and defeated pride in sin. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* shows us that in order for pride not be in sin, we must be proud in front of the disbeliever and humble towards the one who believes in God *the Most High* (*al-Ma'ida*: 54). This is the meaning we find also in God's description of the believers as firm and unyielding towards the infidels, yet full of mercy towards one another (*al-Fath*: 29).

This is the mark of pride in the truth; its sign is that when you gain victory, you show complete humility towards God. We have a fine example in our master the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, who left Mecca because he could not protect the weak and tyrannised believers, and after that he returned to Mecca to conquer it by God's succour; and when he entered Mecca, his head was lowered in humility before God so that it almost touched the pommel of his mount's saddle. This is real power, and it is the opposite of pride in sin which, when it gains victory, acts with tyranny; it is only pride in truth which, when it gains victory, shows humility.

'And when it is said to him, 'Fear God,' pride in the sin takes hold of him....' That is, pride and arrogance are linked to sin, and sin means to go against the command given by the True Lord *the Most High*. '...Sufficient for him is Hellfire, and how wretched the resting place is.' What kind of pride is this which takes one to hell in the end? This is not pride, but rather, it is ignominy, and there is no goodness in an action which leads to, nor any evil in an action which leads to paradise. If you want to be honourable, think about your end and where you are headed.

The expression '...Sufficient for him...' means that this will be a sufficient exposure of his pride in sin. As for the word 'resting place' (*mihad*), it literally means something laid and spread out which is something comfortable to sit on, or travel on, or sleep on. This is why they call a baby's cradle (*mahd*). Does this image of a resting place suit the suffering of hell? Yes, it absolutely does, because the one who sits in a resting-place has no will to get out of it, like a baby which does not have the strength to leave its bed. So

he will have lost his will and his control over his body; and if the resting-place in hell will be like this, it will be the vilest of resting-places. This is one kind of person; and in contrast to this, God *the Most High* gives us another kind of person, saying:

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَشْرِي نَفْسَهُ ابْتِغَاءَ مَرْضَاتِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ رَءُوفٌ بِالْعِبَادِ ﴿٢٠٧﴾

**But there is also a kind of man who gives his life away to please God, and God is most compassionate to His servants [207]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 207)**

When God *the Most High* uses the word ‘sells’ (*shara*), we should notice that this is one of the verbs which can be used to mean one thing and its opposite depending on the context. The word (*shara*) can mean to buy and also to sell, so, it has two meanings. Read what God *the Most High* says in the chapter of *Yusuf* when He tells that the people of the caravan who found Joseph sold (*shara*) him for a paltry price (*Yusuf*: 20).

It can also mean ‘to buy’, as when the ancient Arab poet ‘Antara ibn Shaddad described his horse wading through the thick of the battlefield where it bought (*shara*) and sold.

Thus the word *shara* can be used to mean either ‘buy’ or ‘sell’; it is wording and context that determine what it is intended to mean. When ‘Antara said ‘bought and sold’, we understand that *shara* here means ‘bought’ because it is in contrast with the word *ba‘a*, meaning ‘sold.’ And in God’s telling of the story of Joseph, the context of the verse makes it clear that they sold him. This is part of the greatness of the Arabic language; it is a language which wants people to understand words using their minds, making context determine their understanding of the meanings.

‘And from among the people is he who sells himself....’ We understand that the meaning of the verb *shara* here is ‘to sell’ his self; and the one who sells his self is the one who gives it away in return for some recompense. When a person gives away his self, he sacrifices it; and when the sacrifice is in order to seek God’s pleasure, this is martyrdom in God’s Way. It is as though he sells his self and takes God’s pleasure in return for it. We find this

meaning also in God's statement that He has bought of the believers their lives (*at-Tawba*: 111).

The True Lord *the Most High* gives them paradise in return for their lives and their possessions. So His words 'And from among the people is he who sells himself, seeking means to please God...' mean that he sells his own self and receives paradise in return for it; this is if the meaning of *shara* is 'to sell.'

But what if the meaning of the word here is 'to buy'? In that case, we understand that he buys his own self meaning that he sacrifices everything in the cause of securing his believing soul. It is amazing that it is said that the reason for the revelation of this verse is something which could accommodate both meanings: 'sells' and 'buys.' Abu Yahya, whose full name was Suhayb ibn Sinan Ar-Rumi was in Mecca, and was at an old age. He embraced Islam and wanted to emigrate to Medina, and the disbelievers said to him, 'You came to Mecca as a pauper, and we took you under our wings; and now you are a wealthy man, and you wish to emigrate and take your wealth with you.' He said to them, 'If I leave my wealth to you, will you let me go?' They said yes. He asked them, 'Will you grant me a mount and provisions to take me to Medina?' They said, 'You may have this.'

By doing this, he bought his own self, and gave his riches to preserve his soul's faith. When he arrived in Medina, he met Abu Bakr and 'Umar *God be pleased with them*, who said to him, 'A profitable sale, Abu Yahya!' He replied, 'And may God make all your dealings profitable!'

Our masters Abu Bakr and 'Umar then said to him, 'The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* told us that Gabriel *peace be upon him* told him your story.' It is also narrated that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was the one who said to him, 'A profitable sale, Abu Yahya!' so, the meaning of the verse, in light of this story, is that he bought his soul with his wealth, and the wording of the verse agrees with this meaning. This is one of the benefits of the Quranic discourse, wherein a single word can give two contrasting meanings that are both possible.

But if the meaning is that he sold it, this is a different story: At the battle of Badr, the first battle in the history of Islam, in which the leaders of Quraysh gathered to fight the Muslims, the Muslim fighters were able to kill

some of these leaders and capture many others; and one of those who were slain in this battle was one of the leaders of Quraysh, Abu 'Uqba ibn Al-Harith ibn 'Amer. The one who killed him was one of the Companions of the Prophet, named Khubaib ibn 'Adiyy Al-Ansari Al-Awsi *God be pleased with him*, who was a member of the Aws tribe of Medina. After this, some of the disbelievers plotted and sent a message to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, saying: 'O Messenger of God, we have embraced Islam, and we want you to send us some people to teach us Islam.' So, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* sent to them ten of his Companions to teach them the Quran, and the disbelievers ambushed those ten men and killed all of them except Khubaib ibn 'Adiyy *God be pleased with him* who was able to escape with his life along with another Companion named Zayd ibn Ad-Dathana. But Khubaib *God be pleased with him* was captured, and those who captured him knew he was the one who had killed Abu 'Uqba Al-Harith at the battle of Badr, so they sold him to the son of Abu 'Uqba so he could kill him in revenge for his father. He decided not to kill him, but rather to crucify him alive. When he left him crucified on the stake, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* in Medina said, 'Who will take Khubaib down from his stake and he will have paradise?' Az-Zubayr *God be pleased with him* said, 'I will o Messenger of God!' and Al-Miqdad *God be pleased with him* said, 'I am with him, o Messenger of God!'

They went to Mecca and found Khubaib *God be pleased with him* on the stake, dead, and was surrounded by forty men of Quraysh guarding him. They took advantage of a moment of heedlessness from the guards, and went to the stake and took Khubaib *God be pleased with him* down and took him away. When the people woke up and did not find Khubaib *God be pleased with him* there, they followed the tracks to find the ones who had taken him. Az-Zubayr *God be pleased with him* saw them, and so he threw Khubaib *God be pleased with him* to the ground, and then, looked on as the earth swallowed him up, which is why he was thereafter known as 'The one the earth swallowed.' After this, he looked to them and removed the turban behind which he had concealed his face, and said, 'I am Az-Zubayr ibn Al-'Awwam, my mother is Safiya bint 'Abd Al-Muttalib, and my Companion is Al-Miqdad. If you wish, I will contend with you (that is, compete in boasting about oneself, as was the

custom); and if you wish, I will fight you; and if you wish, you can go away.’ They said, ‘We will go away.’ They went away, and when Az-Zubayr and Al-Miqdad *God be pleased with them* returned to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, he gave them the glad tidings of the same paradise to which Khubaib had gone.

So Khubaib *God be pleased with him* sold his self in return for paradise. Therefore, if you consider the reason for the verse’s revelation to be Abu Yahya Suhayb ibn Sinan Ar-Rumi, *shara* means ‘to buy’; and if you consider the reason for the verse’s revelation to be Khubaib *God be pleased with him*, then *shara* means ‘to sell.’ In this way we find that a single word in the Noble Quran can refer to more than one situation.

Mawiya, the daughter of the man who bought Khubaib ibn ‘Adiyy *God be pleased with him* to give him to ‘Uqba to kill him in revenge for his father, relates: ‘By God, I saw Khubaib eating a bunch of grapes the size of a human head, and by God, there is neither orchard nor grapes in Mecca; it was nothing less than provision which God sent to him.’

When they came to kill him, he said, ‘Allow me first to pray two *rak’as* (cycles) of prayer.’ He prayed two cycles, and then looked to the people and said, ‘By God, were it not that I feared you would say, “He prayed more simply to delay us from killing him”, I would have prayed more.’ And he said before they killed him, ‘O God, count each one of them and kill them all entirely, and spare not a single one of them!’ Then he chanted:

I care not, as I die a Muslim,

On what side my death in God was.

Those were his last words.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...and God is kind to His servants.’ What is the relationship between what has come before and ‘...kind to His servants’? As long as God is kind towards His servants, God did not want to make this obligatory on all Muslims; rather, He made it a rare occurrence in order to strengthen the truth of the matter of faith because He does not want all the Muslims to sacrifice their lives, but rather wants some of us to remain to bear the call of Islam.

After presenting those people who receive the call with disbelief and hypocrisy and then contrasting this with those who receive it with pure faith, the True Lord *the Most High* called all the believers, saying:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا ادْخُلُوا فِي السِّلْمِ كَافَّةً وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا
 خُطَوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ

**You who believe, enter wholeheartedly into submission to
 God and do not follow in Satan's footsteps, for he is your
 sworn enemy [208] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 208)**

The verse begins with a call to those who believe in God, as though He is saying to them: O you who believe in Me, listen to My words! God does not hold morally responsible those who do not believe in Him, but rather, He addresses those who love Him and believe in Him. As long as they love God, every believer must turn to He Whom he loves; for God will only give him that which makes him happy.

So, moral responsibilities from God *the Most High* are means of giving happiness to those He loves: 'O you who have believed, enter into Islam completely....' The word 'into' (*fi*) indicates enclosure which means that something contains something else, like a cup which contains water so that we say 'The water is in (*fi*) the cup.' Likewise, a mosque contains the congregation so that we say, 'The congregation is in the mosque.'

Enclosure means that the container encompasses and surrounds the contents. As long as the container has surrounded the contents, this means that there is nowhere for the contents to escape the container. Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* gives us an image of the domination of enclosure when He *the Exalted* relates Pharaoh's threats to the sorcerers after they embraced faith in God: he threatened to most certainly crucify them in trunks of palm-trees (*Ta Ha*: 71). Notice the use of the word 'in' (*fi*) is used instead of 'on' (*'ala*).

Crucifixion is always done on something, and the noble verse wants to explain for us how the cross can completely dominate the one who is crucified on it. If you want to crucify something on something else you attach it to it,

and if you go very far in attaching it, it is as though you have entered the thing you crucify into the thing upon which you crucify it.

For an example of this, take a matchstick and place it on your finger and then tie it on very tightly with a thread; you will notice that the stick sinks into your skin. The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...enter into Islam completely....’ The words *silm*, *salm*, and *salam* all mean islam, that is ‘surrender’, and they are all based on the same root meaning; for peace (*silm*) is the opposite of war, and Islam came to stop the war between you and the universe in which you live, for your own good and for the good of the universe, and in order that you are in a state of peace with God, and peace with the universe, and peace with other people, and peace with yourself.

He *the Exalted* says, ‘...enter into Islam completely...’ meaning ‘until surrender encloses you.’ God is the Divine Creator of the universe, and you must live in peace with Him because you only believe in Him as the One God. We must live with the earth, the sky and the universe in peace; for the universe, which is subdued, overpowered and compelled so that it cannot evade what has been ordained from it, works to serve you, and does not defy you.

When a person is obedient to God, everything in existence is pleased with him because existence obeys and extols God; and if it finds a person extolling God as it does, it will *be pleased with him* because he is in a state of peace with the universe; and you are at peace with yourself since you have will, and God has subdued all of your limbs to this will, and every limb does what you want it to do; but is each limb pleased by what you tell it to do? This is something else. For example, your tongue responds to your will, and you use it to say, ‘There is no god but God’, whilst other people such as idolaters say something else, associating with God human beings and other things which they worship; and atheists use their tongues to say, ‘There is no god’. The tongue does not disobey any of these because it is compelled to obey their wills.

The will by which a man controls his tongue and other limbs shall end on the Day of Resurrection, and it will testify against him just as his other limbs will testify against him: the feet, the hands, the eyes and the ears; every limb will admit what he did with them because mankind will have no control over

those limbs on that day, but rather, all control will be for the Almighty Creator. On that day, He *the Exalted* poses this question: With whom will sovereignty rest on that Day? And He answers it: With God, the One Who holds absolute sway over all that exists (*Ghafir*: 16).

When the True Lord *the Most High* calls the believers to enter wholly into self-surrender, this also means that the True Lord *the Most High* tells the believers not to enter the religion partially, leaving some of it aside. He says to them: Take Islam in its entirety, and implement it completely because Islam is like a building which has plain foundations and clear bases; so, no one should try and take something from one ruling whilst being far from another, for otherwise there will be imbalance.

For example, you might find a dispute between a husband and wife, and this dispute might lead to acrimony and divorce, and after this we find people who accuse Islam of having given men too much power over women. We say to them: Why do you accuse Islam? Did you enter marriage from an Islamic perspective? If you entered marriage from an Islamic perspective, you will find that there are organised rules which preserve the woman's dignity; but there are those who enter marriage from a non-Islamic perspective, and then, when there is a crisis, they start calling out to Islam. Did the man choose someone to share his life based on the standards of the religion? Did he consider the conditions for choosing a good wife mentioned in the Noble Hadith: Abu Huraira *God be pleased with him* relates that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'A woman is married for four things: her wealth, her lineage, her beauty, and her religion; so succeed by choosing the one who has religion, may your hands become dusty (otherwise)!'⁽¹⁾

Did the man prefer a religious woman to another? Or, did he give preference to some other quality? And when a man came to ask for a woman's hand in marriage from her father, did the father give any consideration to Islam when he approved this marriage? Did you choose someone whose religion and character pleased you? Or did you leave aside these principles? You left aside the principles of Islam, so, why do you blame Islam when things turn out badly?

(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, An-Nasa'i, and Ibn Maja.

If you want to judge, you must subject all your affairs to the standards of Islam, and then act in a way which is appropriate to Islam. If you do so, Islam will protect you from everything. Islam supports the powers in the universe, and supports the power of the soul so that it lives with peace and does not rebel; for the opposite of all of this is war, and war only occurs when powers oppose one another so that the powers of your soul oppose one another in a war within your soul, and human powers oppose one another in wars between humans and other humans; and your power opposes the other powers of the universe, as you oppose nature and you oppose the True Lord *the Most High*.

So, opposition causes war, and war only occurs if whims differ from one another. The whims of human beings cannot come together unless they are governed by the values of the One Who has no whims; this is why God *the Most High* says that if the truth were to follow their inclinations, the heavens and the earth would surely have fallen into ruin, and all that lives in them (*al-Mu'minun*: 71).

Why? Leave aside the mute universe around you; or leave aside those things in the universe which have no free will to act or respond to you, acting or responding to you without having any choice in the matter. Rather, consider human beings, your own race: what is it that makes the whim of one man dominate the whims of all others?

What extra thing does this man have so that you should follow him, or that he should follow you? Nature decrees that no one will follow anyone else unless they believe him to be superior to them, but no human being can have this kind of superiority. Therefore, all human beings must follow a power which they believe is superior to all of them. When we believe, we enter into self-surrender, and there is no opposition between any two powers because I am not subservient to you or you to me, and you and I are both in surrender to a power which is superior to both of us. And it is essential that the power which we both dutifully follow should gain no benefit from what it decrees.

Human lawmakers look after their own benefits when they make laws; the communist lawmaker makes laws which are against capitalism, and the capitalist lawmaker makes laws which are against communism. But when the lawmaker does not benefit from what he legislates, this is the legislation of the True Lord *the Most High*.

When we enter Islam, we all enter so that none of us is left out, and this is the meaning of '...enter into Islam completely....' This is one possible meaning for the verse; there is also another possible meaning which is: Enter into self-surrender, namely Islam, with all of its moral responsibilities so that you do not leave out a single responsibility.

When the first meaning applies, it is because if we did not all enter into self-surrender, the ones who surrendered would be made miserable by those who did not because the one who surrendered would refine his way of behaving with others, and the one who surrendered would give benefit to other people, but would suffer at the hands of those who did not surrender. It is for all of our benefit that we all surrender to God, and those who do not comprehend this fact interpret incorrectly God's words to the believers that those who go astray can do them no harm if they themselves are on the right path (*al-Ma'ida*: 105).

Part of your being on the right path is that you guide those who do not believe so that they believe; for it is in all of your interests that you all surrender. If you yourself surrender, your surrender will affect others positively because your behaviour will become upright and refined; as for the one who does not surrender, his behaviour will be neither upright nor refined, and you yourself will suffer because of him. It is therefore in your interest to spend much time and expend much effort in calling others to enter into Islam. Beware of saying that this will cause you to miss out on opportunities in life; no; it will secure for you opportunities in life, and your time will not be wasted because you will protect yourself from the evils of those who do not surrender.

Remember well that when we spoke about the chapter of *al-Fatiha*, we said that God *the Most High* teaches us to pray in the plural and say 'You alone do we worship' (*al-Fatiha*: 5), so, all of us, Lord, worship You, and this will make us all happy; and guide us all, Lord, for if I alone am guided, then, others will enjoy my guidance, whilst I will suffer from their misguidance. It is therefore in all our interest for all of us to be guided.

This is considering the meaning of 'enter completely' as 'all of you,' 'into Islam'. Keeping this in mind, the meaning of the verse stating that those who go astray can do the believers no harm if they themselves are on the right path

(*al-Ma'ida*: 105), will be: You will not bear the burden of their misguidance if you enjoin upon them what is right and forbid them from what is wrong.

As for the second meaning: 'Enter into Islam in such a way that none of you is left out by taking certain things and parts of Islam and leaving others.' You want to build your life, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* explains that Islam has bases which are five Pillars; so, beware, for example, of taking three pillars and leaving two aside because the architecture of Islam is built upon five pillars.

An architect once said to me: 'We can support a building on three pillars, or four, or five.' I said to him, 'But once you have made the building with four pillars, and the weight and burden has been distributed over four pillars, can you, after it has been built, make it three pillars only?' He said no.

I said, 'Then a building can only be built from the beginning on the supports that you have planned for it, and this is why you distribute the strength on three, four, or five pillars at the beginning.' God *the Most High* willed to make the supports of Islam five, and after this Islam was built; and now, that Islam has been built, beware of taking one brick of Islam and not another, but rather, Islam must be taken in its entirety. The current problems of the Islamic world have only been caused by the picking and choosing that has occurred in the Muslim world, this picking and choosing which attempts to take part of Islam and leave part of it. This is the cause of all the hardships and problems because Islam must be taken in its entirety all at once. So '...enter into Islam completely...' means: Beware of leaving any rulings aside. The thing which causes hardships for those people who belong to the religion in these days is that we live a partial Islamic life in nations which take their laws from non-Islamic nations.

In order for us to succeed in our lives, we must take all of Islam. Sadly, many rulers of Muslim countries take nothing from Islam except the final part of God's command to the believers to obey God and obey the Messenger and those who are in authority from among them (*an-Nisa*': 59). They take the command concerned with obeying those who are in authority and leave out the command concerned with obeying God and the Messenger.

I say: Why do you take the final part and leave out what comes before it? God *the Most High* did not ordain an independent obedience for the one who has been entrusted with authority; but rather, He ordained obedience to God and obedience to the Messenger and those who are in authority in order to show that obedience to the authority figure comes after obedience to God and obedience to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. We do not want any picking and choosing in Islam; take it all, and you will find peace, and we will find peace with you.

By calling us to enter into Islam, the True Lord *the Most High* wants to safeguard people from the trials and ordeals of their differing whims, and He removed from His servants the burden of those things in which they might differ, and left them free to continue the mission of discovering God's secrets in the universe by empirical science, as they wish; if they want to advance, let them apply their minds which God created to the universe which God created with the power which God created, in order that they make themselves happy and push themselves towards advancement. And if any of them finds out a fact about the universe and discovers one of the secrets of the universe, he will not be offering the people anything new connected with religious guidance, and so they will accept this new thing and will not oppose him.

So, it is possible that scientists can unravel some of the material mysteries of the universe by using empirical science, and these are things which people would willingly agree upon; but people can differ about those things which come from their whims because each one of them has his own whim, and each one of them wants to follow his own whim and not the whims of others. The True Lord *the Most High* wants to protect us from caprices, and so He said to us, '...Enter completely into Islam....' That is, enter into every facet of Islam so that conflicts of whims will not affect society.

Be, o believer, at peace with yourself so that your tongue does not contradict what is in your heart. Do not be a believer with your tongue and a disbeliever in your heart; be at harmony with yourself so that you do not suffer from inner turmoil. Also, enter into peace with the universe in which you live: with the sky, and the earth, and with animals and with plants. Be at peace with all of these creatures because they

have been created in a state of compulsion and obedience to God; so, do not go astray yourself lest you incur their anger and resentment.

Be in harmony with time, as well, for the time in which you disobey God's Way of guidance will curse you, as will the place. If you want to spread your peace throughout the universe, you must do as the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* taught you, and extend peace towards the whole universe. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* would spread peace through times and places; for example, He *peace and blessings be upon him* would fast more than anyone else in the month of *Sha'ban*, and when the Companions asked him about this, he told them that *Sha'ban* is a month which people ignore because it falls between *Rajab* – one of the four sacred months – and *Ramadan* (the month of fasting), and so he loved to greet this month which the people ignored. It is as though the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to please this time by associating an act of worship with it so that it would not be inferior to other times and months.

Likewise, places want to be pleased by you, and every place is pleased when God is remembered within it. After commanding us all to enter into Islam with 'Do' and 'Do not', the True Lord *the Most High* warned us against following Satan because he is the one who works to make us stray far from God's Way of guidance, and so He *the Exalted* said, '...and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy.'

Why should we not follow in Satan's footsteps? Because of his enmity towards mankind is a long-standing enmity. He took this stance in relation to Adam *peace be upon him*, and after that he swore by God's might that he would lead all of you astray. By telling us this story, the True Lord *the Most High* gave us immunity so that Satan would not surprise us. The True Lord *the Most High* only told us the story of Satan and Adam *peace be upon him* in clear terms in order to give us immunity which is indicated by the fact that when we want to protect our bodies, we give ourselves immunisations before the illness comes: we protect ourselves against polio, cholera, and so on. It is as though God *the Most High* reminds us of the story of Satan and our father Adam *peace be upon him* in order to say to us: Be aware that his enmity is a lasting one.

Since Satan holds a long-standing enmity towards you, he will not take you by surprise because God has told you what happened with the first man. When Satan is mentioned in the Quran, sometimes what is meant by him is the disobedient jinn – for an obedient jinn is just like an obedient human being – and sometimes what is meant are the wicked demons from amongst mankind. So some jinn are demons, and some humans are demons as well.

In order to tell the difference between what Satan makes to allure you and what your own soul makes to allure you, notice the following: if you find that your heart is bent upon one particular act of disobedience, know that the cause is your own soul because the soul wants you to disobey in a way which will satisfy something it craves, and so it will insist upon it. If a person loves wealth, his base soul would overcome him through wealth; another person loves sex, and so his soul would overcome him through women; a third person loves pride and praise, and so his soul would overcome him through those who flatter him hypocritically. But Satan does not insist upon any particular form of disobedience: if he sees that you have refused to do one sin, he will try and tempt you to do another because he wants you to sin in any way.

The True Lord *the Most High* warns us: ‘...and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy.’ There is no enmity clearer than that of Satan after he opposed Adam *peace be upon him* and threatened, as the True Lord *the Most High* related about him, to beguile Adam’s children all into grievous error except those of them who are truly and genuinely God’s servants (*Sad*: 82-83).

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

فَإِنْ زَلَلْتُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَتْكُمْ الْبَيِّنَاتُ فَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٢٠٩﴾

**If you slip back after clear proof has come to you,
then be aware that God is almighty and wise [209]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 209)**

To ‘lapse’ (*zalla*) means to disobey, and it is derived from the verb (*zala*), which means for something to cease being straight and upright. It is as though everything has its proper upright position, and to depart from this is considered a

‘slip’ (*zalat*); and a ‘slip’ means those sins and acts of disobedience by which the upright way is contravened.

By saying, ‘...after clear signs have come to you...’ God *the Most High* explains to us: There can be no excuse for you to stumble because I have clarified everything for you, and I have not left you to your own minds; it is logical that you utilise your minds correctly to manage the motions of the universe in which I have made you My vicegerents; but despite this, if heedlessness afflicts you, I send messengers. This is why He *the Exalted* said that He would never chastise before He has sent a messenger (*al-Isra*: 15).

Out of God’s mercy on mankind He sent the messengers to show mankind the right way from the crooked way. The True Lord *the Most High* left some things for mankind to deduce by their own intellect, and then Islam approved of what they deduced, in order to teach us that if the mind is healthy and logical, it is able to be guided to the right conclusion by itself. In the history of Islam, we find that our master ‘Umar *God be pleased with him* had certain opinions and made certain suggestions, and the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* agreed with them, and then the Quran was revealed in accordance with what ‘Umar *God be pleased with him* suggested. Someone might wonder about this, and say: ‘Would it not have been more appropriate for the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to do this?’

We say: If these opinions had come from the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, it would not have been unusual because the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* is infallible and divinely inspired. But God wanted to say to us: When the natural intellect is pure, it can be guided to the right conclusion even if this conclusion has not yet been revealed from heaven. This is why many of the orientalist were so perturbed by our master ‘Umar *God be pleased with him* that they said: ‘Do you not have anyone but ‘Umar? What about Muhammad?’

We say to them: ‘Umar *God be pleased with him* was educated in the school of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, and everything he said, he took from the Prophet *peace and blessing be upon him* and ‘Umar *God be pleased with him* himself acknowledged this when he said, ‘There would be no ‘Umar were it not for Islam.’ We use ‘Umar *God be pleased with him* as an example because he was an

ordinary human being, not a messenger, and he was subject to all that other human beings are subject to, and he received no Divine revelation, nor was he infallible.

So, it is as though the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to take us closer to the power of deduction and understanding so that we would all be like 'Umar because 'Umar was guided to the truth by natural disposition. He would say to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, 'We should do this,' and then the revelation would come down in agreement with what he said. It is as though God did not command us excessively, but rather, His commands of moral responsibility came to protect the intellect from the caprices of the soul which stifle the intellect. The nemesis of idea is caprice, and were it not for caprice, all ideas would be united in agreement.

In the past, they used to tell the parable of the woman who made it summer and winter in a single night. Her son and daughter both got married, and all four lived with her in one house: her son and his wife, and her daughter and her husband, and the woman with them. She would sleep a little and then, go to her daughter and say, 'Keep your husband warm and please him, for the weather is cold,' and then go to her son and say, 'Keep off your wife, for it is very hot!'

It was the same place, on the same night, but the woman made it summer and winter at the same time; and the cause of this was the caprice of the soul. God *the Most High* clarifies this when He says that if the truth were to follow their inclinations, the heavens and the earth would surely have fallen into ruin, and all that lives in them (*al-Mu'minun*: 71).

So, the True Lord *the Most High* protects us from error when He legislates for us. Human beings are destined to fail when they make laws by themselves for themselves, trying to lessen the mistakes of man-made laws by legislating other things to alter what they already have. If you look at the laws they have altered, you will say that these changes are in line with Islam, or are close to Islam.

In America, some people asked me, 'Why did Islam not prevail over all other faiths, yet, you say that God *the Most High* says in His Book that He would make Islam prevail over all religions (*at-Tawba*: 33), yet your religion has not prevailed over all other religions, and many people are still not Muslims, whether they are Jews, Christians, or agnostics?' I answered: if you reflect on God's words that Islam would prevail however hateful this may be to disbelievers and

however hateful this may be to polytheists (*at-Tawba*: 33), this would show you that the rise of Islam occurred in the presence of disbelievers, and in the presence of polytheists; if it had risen without there being anything else with it, then who would find it hateful? The doctrine that the people of disbelief hate is the same which gives might to the existence of Islam. Therefore, the statement that Islam would be made to prevail over all other religions indicates that the rise of Islam entailed the existence of disbelievers and idolaters, both of whom would exist, and would hate the spread of the religion.

We all witness the events of life which disturb the western nations when they find errors in their legislations and try to alter them, but they cannot find any proper way of altering them other than adopting the laws of Islam, which they do not adopt as a religion, but rather as a system. Their recourse to Islam is a clear proof and a confirmation of the soundness and correctness of the laws of Islam. Had they taken those laws as religious laws, some people would have said, 'They have only shown allegiance to the religion in which they believe by applying its laws,' yet despite their hatred for the religion they are forced to adopt its teachings, as though there is no solution for them other than to adopt what Islam established.

So, God's words that He will make Islam prevail over all other religions (*at-Tawba*: 33) show the strength of the system of Islam: you do not believe in it, but yet, you are forced to adopt it. In Italy, for example, they used to criticise Islam because it allows divorce, and they considered this to be a contravention of women's rights; but then, conditions of life and domestic problems forced them to legalise divorce. Did they legalise it because Islam said so? No, but rather, they found that they could only solve their problems by doing it.

And in America, when they waged a broad campaign against alcohol, did they ban it because Islam banned it? No; but rather, because the realities of the healthy life required them to do so. So the words: however hateful this may be to all disbelievers, and however hateful this may be to all polytheists (*at-Tawba*: 33) mean that they will turn to the system of Islam to solve their problems; if they do not adopt it as a religion, they will adopt it as a system.

'But if you lapse after clear signs have come to you, know that God is Mighty, Wise.' This means: beware of thinking that by your lapses, you have

gained what you wish for and evaded God's judgement; for you shall return to God, and He is Almighty, and His Might lies in the fact that He always prevails and cannot be prevailed upon, and He manages our affairs with mercy and wisdom.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

هَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَأْتِيَهُمُ اللَّهُ فِي ظُلُلٍ مِّنَ الْغَمَامِ
وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ وَقُضِيَ الْأَمْرُ إِلَى اللَّهِ تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ ﴿٢١٠﴾

Are these people waiting for God to come to them in the shadows of the clouds, together with the angels? But the matter would already have been decided by then: all matters are brought back to God [210] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 210)

That is, what are they waiting for? Are they waiting for things to catch them unawares so that they find themselves in a universe which, although they have enjoyed its bounties, will turn into chaff blown by the wind, whereupon mankind will come to the moment of reckoning?

God *the Most High* says, 'Are these people waiting....' The word for 'wait' (*nazhara*) is derived from the word *nazhar*, which means 'to consider', that is, to attempt to comprehend something general. Seeking to comprehend anything by any means is called 'consideration' (*nazhar*). For example, we say to someone who is speaking about an abstract concept, 'Do you have no consideration?' That is, do you possess the ability to comprehend, or not?

So, to consider means to seek to comprehend something: If you seek to see something by eyesight, this is *nazhar*, meaning 'to look at' with the eye; if you seek to know and understand, this is *nazhar*, meaning to contemplate with the mind and the heart. Sometimes the word *nazhar* can also mean 'to wait' (*intizhar*), which is to seek to comprehend something which is expected to happen.

The expression 'Are these people waiting, probably, for God to come to them...' which means: Are they waiting for the Hour to come and surprise them at the specific time? For it will not surprise anyone at a random time since it will be foreshadowed by signs, both major and minor; and the meaning of it having signs- major and minor- is that this is proof that God

the Most High grants us respite so that we can correct ourselves; He will keep the door to repentance open until the sun rises from the west.

When we hear God's words 'Are these people waiting, probably, for God to come to them...' we say: What is it which has kept them from entering completely into Islam? What are they waiting for? It is just like when you say to someone standing inactive in front of you, 'What are you waiting for?' Likewise, the True Lord *the Most High* urges us to enter completely into Islam; if you do not, what are you waiting for?

Let us now look at the expression '...for God to come to them in shadows of clouds, with the angels...' When you say '...for God to come,' or 'Your Lord comes,' and God *the Most High* uses similar expressions in the Quran which pertain to things which we recognise as actions of created beings, such as 'coming' and 'going', and human features like 'face' and 'hand', we must understand them in the light of God's statement: There is nothing like Him (*ash-Shura*: 11); for God exists, and you exist, but is your existence like His? No.

God *the Most High* is Alive, and you are alive; but is your life like His? No. And God *the Most High* hears, and you hear; but is your hearing like His? No. And God sees, and you see, but is your sight like His? No. As long as you believe that He has attributes which are like those which you have, you must understand them in relation to God *the Most High* in the light of: There is nothing like Him.

Those who explain the 'Face of God' as His Being, and His hand as His power, and the statement that the hand of God is over their hands (*al-Fath*: 10) as meaning 'His power is over their powers,' we say to them: Why these interpretations? If we simply took these things the way the True Lord said them about Himself, but in the light of 'There is nothing like Him,' we would be safe from error: we would not neither liken Him to His creation, nor remove a text from its proper meaning.

This is why the people of discernment say: You should believe in God *the Most High* according to the image of faith in Him which He has given you, but in a way which does not go against the fact that 'There is nothing like Him.' If you imagine anything, your Lord is different from what you imagine; for whatever occurs to your mind, God *the Most High* is different from that, since nothing can occur to the human mind save those images with which it is

familiar, and as long as they are familiar images this means they are creations of God, and He *the Most High* does not resemble His creation.

The moment the True Lord *the Most High* reveals Himself, all those who imagined God as having any particular form will be surprised that He is not as they imagined He was, and God will come to them with a reality which never crossed their minds; for if the image of the True Lord *the Most High* were in the minds of men, this would mean that they had become capable of imagining Him, and He is the All-Powerful Who can never be encompassed. It is part of His magnificence that the mind cannot physically imagine Him. Therefore, God *the Most High* gives us an example in order to illustrate this for us, saying that there are signs for men of belief in their own selves (*adh-Dhariyat*: 21). The spirit which resides in the realm of our bodies, and which if it exits from a person he becomes a corpse and then breaks down into components which rot and dry up – this spirit which is inside all of us cannot be envisaged by anyone, nor can its position or shape be ascertained. We cannot even envisage this spirit which was created by God, so, how can we hope to envisage the Almighty Creator?

The question ‘Are these people waiting, probably, for God to come to them...’ means: in a way which they had not expected. Are they waiting until they see the amazing, harmonious universe be obliterated, the whole universe be disintegrated and the sun overthrown, and the stars fall, and everything in existence change; and then they will be surprised to find themselves before their Lord. So what are they waiting for?

They must grasp the opportunity to act before all of this takes place, and before the chance slips from their hands and their possibility of returning to God ends. Why do they delay entering completely into Islam? What are they waiting for? Are they waiting for God to change or for God’s Way to change? This will not happen.

We emphasise again that when we hear something related to the True Lord *the Most High* which has an equivalent in humans, we must take this in the light of ‘There is nothing like Him;’ for just as you believe that God has an Essence which is not like other essences, you must also know that God has attributes which are not like other attributes, and that God has actions which are not like other actions. Do not affirm that God’s Essence is different from human

essences, and then, take the attributes which God ascribes to Himself and make them just like human attributes. If God ‘comes’, do not imagine that His coming is such that He goes from one place to another, for He *the Exalted* is omnipresent and no place is devoid of Him, and this is part of His majesty.

When it is said ‘...for God to come to them...’ do not think that His coming is like yours because His Essence is not like your essence and because people’s actions differ according to their levels so that their actions differ according to their status and their attributes differ according to their status, whilst the True Lord *the Most High* is beyond all things and all imagination. Let us take everything about Him according to ‘There is nothing like Him’: your Lord’s actions are different from your actions, and beware of subjecting His actions to the laws of your own actions; for your own actions require effort and time which differ according to your power and your ability, whilst God does things without any effort so that it takes Him no time at all, but rather, He says ‘Be!’, and it is.

It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* wants to give us an image of the event which humans will not be able to choose to avoid, and so says: When this thing takes place, no created being will have any power over it, and all authority will be for God Alone.

Are these people waiting, probably, for God to come to them in shadows of clouds, with the angels; and by then the matter will have been decided? And to God all matters are returned.

‘...In shadows of clouds...’ There are things which shade you, and things by which you seek shade. You have no control over the things which shade you except inasmuch as you see where their shadow falls and so go to that place. There are other things which you can control, such as parasols, which you can open wherever you want. The word ‘shadows’ (*zhulal*) means things which cover you from the source of light; this meaning is illustrated in another verse, albeit in a different context, where the True Lord *the Most High* describes the state of people on board a ship in a storm where the waves engulf them like shadows (*Luqman*: 32).

That is, the greatest fear comes to them like a shadow engulfing them. It is as though God *the Most High* wants to tell us that the entire universe will be

obliterated and there will come unto you the terrifying thing, the calamitous thing. The believer will have been expecting it, and it will be cool and peaceful for him because this is what he embraced faith for. But the disbeliever will be afflicted with the greatest fear because he will be surprised by something he will not have been expecting.

Compare the coming of this event to the one who was expecting it, and its coming to the one who was not expecting it. The True Lord *the Most High* is saying that when these shadows and the angels come, the matter will have been decided. When you hear, '...the matter will have been decided...' know that this means that the chance will have slipped from the hands of the people, and so those who have not already returned to their Lord will have no further chance to return. An example of this is what the True Lord said in the story of Noah *peace be upon him*: And the matter was decided and the ark came to rest on Mount Judi (*Hud*: 44).

That is, everything was over, and the people had no ability to repent what they had been doing. God *the Most High* says: What are you waiting for? Are you waiting until this day comes to you? You must take the opportunity to return to your Lord before the chance to go back slips away from you. '...And to God all matters are returned.' Sometimes, in other verses, we have a slightly different version of this statement: 'and to God all matters return.'

There is a difference between 'matters return' in the active form, and 'matters are returned' in the passive form. It is as though matters sometimes are said to move of their own accord, and other times they are said to be driven to God: the willing person will return to his Lord by himself because he will be going on to the goodness which he is waiting for; on the other hand, the unwilling one, who did not hope to meet his Lord, will be taken back against his will, and another force will come and send him back; those who do not come willingly will be made to come against their will.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

سَلِّ بَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ كَمْ ءَاتَيْنَهُم مِّنْ ءَايَةٍ بَيِّنَةٍ وَمَنْ يُبَدِّلْ نِعْمَةَ
 ٱللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَآءَتْهُ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ شَدِيدُ ٱلْعِقَابِ ﴿٢١١﴾

**[Prophet], ask the Children of Israel how many clear signs
 We brought them. If anyone alters God's blessings after he
 has received them, God is stern in punishment [211]
 (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 211)**

It is as though God *the Most High* is not directly rebuking the children of Israel because He wanted them to admit themselves the good with which God honoured them previously. When you say, 'Ask so-and-so what I did for him,' you only ask that because of you are certain that he will not be able to answer in any way that does not support your side. The True Lord *the Most High* is telling His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask the children of Israel about the goodness which He previously bestowed upon them, and He *the Exalted* well knows that despite their argumentative nature they will not be able to say anything which does not confirm the point which He is making, and will therefore become an argument against them.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'Ask the Children of Israel how many clear signs we have given them....' When you hear the words 'how many' in a situation such as this, know that it is a way of affirming that something is copious, and is different to the expression 'how many' which is intended as a question. You say, 'How many times have I done this for so-and-so,' or 'How many good turns have I done him,' and 'How indulging have I been with him,' and 'How generous have I been to him!' So when you hear this kind of 'how many', know that it implies a large quantity which could be figuratively described as being 'beyond counting.'

'Ask the Children of Israel how many clear signs we have given them....' The True Lord *the Most High* wants to give us an example like the example of someone who usurps your wealth and denies your favours, and complains about you to others, and so you respond to the one who conveys to you his complaint: 'Ask him about all the favours I have done for him,' I myself will not talk, but rather will make him do the talking. You would not say this unless you are certain that he will not be able to deny a thing.

Did He not part the sea for them? Did He not transform Moses' staff into a snake? Did God not shade them with clouds? Did God not give them manna and quails? God gave them all of this, and they did not give thanks for God's blessings, and so they incurred His wrath. He afflicted them with drought and famine, and sent upon them lice, frogs, and blood; God did all this with them. And when the True Lord *the Most High* says to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, 'Ask the Children of Israel...' this applies also to the community of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*. If one of them comes to you, ask him: 'How many signs did God give to you, and then you denied them, and procrastinated, and were stubborn?' Now we come to the question: '...how many clear signs we have given them....' The words 'how many' indicate a large quantity, and 'sign' means a miraculous thing, and 'clear' means something plain which no one can fail to notice.

'Ask the Children of Israel how many clear signs we have given them. And whoever changes the favour of God after it has reached him; assuredly God is severe in chastisement. How can someone change God's favour? When God's favour comes to a person, they should meet it with gratitude; and 'gratitude' means to ascribe the favour to the One Who gave it, and to be ashamed to disobey the One Who granted the favour to them. If people meet God's favour in any other way than this, it has thereby been changed. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* poses the question in another verse: Have you not seen those who have changed God's favour for disbelief? (*Ibrahim*: 28) Since they have preferred to deny it, this means that disbelief has taken the place of faith. So they should have met God's blessing with faith, and by drawing nearer to God, but they exchanged the blessing for disbelief.

'...And whoever changes the favour of God after it has reached him, assuredly God is severe in chastisement.' We might understand that 'severe in chastisement' is something related to the Hereafter; and perhaps there are some who see the Hereafter as something very far-off, or who do not believe in the Hereafter at all, and if this chastisement were confined to the punishment of the Hereafter only, people would be made miserable by those who do not believe in the Hereafter, or who see it as far-off because they would spread corruption throughout the earth, not fearing the Hereafter, or even believing in it, or even thinking of it at all.

The one who believes that the Hereafter will come and that there will be a reckoning therein, will behave according to this belief; on the other hand, the one who does not believe that there will be a Last Day, he will make the world miserable. If God had not made a form of immediate chastisement for those who do not believe in the Hereafter, or those who see the Hereafter as far-off, people would all be made miserable by those who do not believe, or who see it as far-off.

For every group which does not accept the way of God, and exchanges God's favours for ingratitude, it must be that God has some kind of immediate chastisement for them; this is so people know that he who is not deterred by faith and fear of the Last Day should be deterred by fear that retribution will come to him in this world. If a wrongdoer knows that another wrongdoer like him was punished and held to account in this world, he will fear to do wrong even if he does not believe in the Hereafter because he will be sure that he will definitely be held to account himself. This is why God *the Most High* does not delay all retribution to the Hereafter, but rather, He unleashes some of it in this world. The True Lord *the Most High* says about those who exchange God's blessings for ingratitude that they have caused their people to land in that abode of utter desolation, hell, which they will have to endure, and how vile a state to settle in (*Ibrahim*: 28-29).

This is the punishment of the Hereafter; and God *the Most High* will not leave them in this world without any punishment.

And even those who do wrong and deviate despite being Muslims, God will not leave them unpunished in this world, and will not delay their punishment to the Day of Resurrection; rather, something must happen to them in their worldly life to make them a lesson to others so that the motions of life will be upright for all people, otherwise people will suffer on their hands, and the hands of those who do not believe in the punishment of the Hereafter.

A righteous scholar used to say, 'O God, the people see Your Hereafter as being far-off, and Your forbearance has deluded them; so, take them to task as only the Almighty Who can determine all things!' For if He *the Exalted* delayed their punishment to the Hereafter, they would be corrupted and would be a trial for the believers around them. Because of this, God decreed to ordain, in His way of faith, laws of crime and punishment which take

place in this world. Why? It is so that corruption is not spread by those who doubt in the Hereafter. God does not make His severe chastisement in the Hereafter only, but rather, He also makes it in this world as well, which is why God *the Most High* says that the one who turns away from His monition, his shall be a life of misery; and on the Day of Resurrection He shall raise him up blind (*Ta Ha*: 124).

Then He *the Exalted* says:

زَيْنَ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا وَيَسْحَرُونَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ
 اتَّقَوْا فَوْقَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يَرْزُقُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ ﴿٢١٢﴾

The life of this world is made to seem glamorous to the disbelievers, and they laugh at those who believe. But those who are mindful of God will be above them on the Day of Resurrection: God provides immeasurably for whoever He pleases [212] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 212)

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to make us see the place of man in the universe, this place which shows that he is the master of that universe, which means that all other beings serve him. We know that minerals serve vegetables, and minerals and vegetables serve animals, and minerals, vegetables and animals all serve man, and so man is the master of these beings.

Logic dictates that this master should search for a being higher than himself; for just as the beings below him were at his service, this higher being must in turn also merit mastery. Yet, he could find nothing in existence which is higher than the race to which he belonged, and so man should have said: I want another being to tell me about myself, for I am in dire need of this. And so when the messengers came and said, 'The One Who is higher than you, o man, is God, and there is nothing like Him, and He is exalted above all species;' man should have welcomed this information, for the knowledge of God solved the mystery for him. The messengers only came to solve the mystery which man was trying to solve, and so man should have rejoiced in the coming of the messengers, especially since God *the Most High* did not want any favour from him; man is the one who needs to worship God so, He will

subdue all created beings for him, and he worships Him so that He gives him honour. So the believer stands between two things: between that which is compelled to serve him and is lower than him, namely the species of minerals, vegetables and animals, and One Who gives to him and favours him willingly and is higher than him, namely God.

So, if someone takes one of these and leaves the other, he has thereby taken the lower and left the higher, and so the True Lord *the Most High* says to him: Take the higher. If you are happy with what you are given by creatures which are lower than you, and you like to get more from them, how can you not want to get more from One Who is higher than you? He is God.

When the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘Beautified for those who disbelieve, is the life of this world...’, He wants to alert us to the fact that the standards of the disbelievers are inferior, base standards because the thing which seems goodly to them is the lower matter, and it is terrible judgement for a person to take the lower thing and favour it to the higher. When the word ‘beautified’ (*zuyyina*) is mentioned in the Quran, it is in the Arabic passive voice verb form, such as in God’s statement that beautified for man is the enjoyment of worldly desires through women, children and heaped-up treasures of gold and silver (*Al-‘Imran*: 14).

There, it is ‘beautified for man,’ and here in the verse of the chapter of *al-Baqara* which we are currently examining, it is ‘Beautified for those who disbelieve....’ Why did the True Lord *the Most High* say here ‘Beautified for those who disbelieve...’? It is because those who disbelieve have nothing, but the life of this world, for they do not believe in anything higher; but when it comes to people in general, God *the Most High* says that beautified for man is the enjoyment of worldly desires through women, children, heaped-up treasures of gold and silver, horses of high mark, cattle and lands. All this may be enjoyed in the life of this world – but the most beautiful of all goals is with God (*Al-‘Imran*: 14). He *the Exalted* is saying to mankind: Take life as it comes. The word (*zuyyinat*) literally means ‘was made beautiful. Who was it who made them beautiful? God *the Most High* made them beautiful. How can you forget the One Who made them beautiful for you, and made them attractive, and placed them under your command?

It was essential that you took them as a means to faith in Him Who provided them to you, and that whenever you see something beautiful in existence, you say 'Glory be to God!' and increase your faith in God. As for you taking the thing and removing it from the One Who created it, this is an inferior standard of judgement.

Or, God *the Most High* made them beautiful by placing in man instincts which are attracted to the things which this worldly life offers him. We say: Did He *the Exalted* give these instincts and then not give a way of guidance to elevate these instincts? No; He gave these instincts and also gave a way of guidance to elevate these instincts, so, do not take one and leave the other. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* says that good lasting deeds are of far greater merit (*al-Kahf*: 46).

When the True Lord *the Most High* says, 'Beautified for those who disbelieve is the life of this world...' He exposes those who think that there is no life after this life. We say to them: This is an inferior standard, and an imprecise judgement, and proof of foolishness because you have gone to what is lower and discarded what is higher; and it is strange that you have done this; and then there are these clear differences between you and those who chose what is higher. You are in the lower position, and yet you ridicule those who gave regard to what is higher. The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...and they ridicule those who believe....' Why do they ridicule them? Because those who believe are devout, and as long as someone is devout, he will keep himself away from anything in existence which comes to him from an unlawful source, whilst those others have turned all their powers and faculties to all in life which is attractive to them.

This is why you find a person living within the means of his lawful income, owning nothing, but a single suit of clothes, while another person steals from others. You find that the latter person lives, by the wealth of others, with a fine and neat appearance, and when the two of them meet, the one who steals ridicules the one who lives lawfully. Why? That is because he sees himself as being superior to him; he sees himself in his neat and 'chic' attire. So the True Lord passes final judgement on this matter and says, '...but those who fear God are above them on the Day of Resurrection....' Why on the Day of Resurrection? Are they not already above them now?

The True Lord *the Most High* is speaking about the way people see things; for they do not see inner peace, the harmony of a person's faculties when he goes to sleep having not inflicted upon himself a religious error, or a moral error, and having hurt no one, and having not engaged in corruption, and having not tale-borne or backbitten anyone; how will he be, when he thinks about his actions during the day before he sleeps? He will certainly feel a happiness which cannot be rivalled by the wealth of this world.

This is why God does not enter this feeling into the comparison, but rather, He uses something over which no one has power: '...but those who fear God are above them on the Day of Resurrection....' Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* says that wrongdoers are wont to laugh at believers, and whenever they pass by them, they wink at one another derisively, and whenever they return to people of their own kind, they return full of jests, and whenever they see those who believe, they say that these people have indeed gone astray but they have not been given the charge to watch over the beliefs of others (*al-Mutaffifin*: 29-33).

And then, after this, the True Lord *the Most High* gives us the final picture: On the Day of Judgment, the believers will laugh at the erstwhile disbelievers as, resting in paradise on couches, they will look on and ask whether the disbelievers were justly rewarded for what they were doing (*al-Mutaffifin*: 34-36).

That is: 'Did We not know how to requite them?' We say, 'Yes, Lord!' – Particularly since the laughter of the Hereafter will not be followed by weeping.

God says, '...but those who fear God are above them on the Day of Resurrection....' Notice that the True Lord *the Most High* changes the usual approach in this verse since it might have been supposed that He would say: Those who believe, shall be above them. Instead, He said '...but those who fear God are above them....' because faith might only be nominal: it might be known of you that you are a believer, but this attribution is not enough to ensure that you will attain the highest rank unless your actions show you to be God-fearing.

So do not say, 'I am a believer', and then, someone else says, 'I am a believer', and the 'believers' come to number billions of people all over the world; we say to them: You cannot attain faith simply by name; you can only attain faith by adhering to the Way of Heaven. This is why God *the Most High* did not say: Those who believe shall be above them on Resurrection Day; but

rather, He said, ‘...but those who fear God are above them...’ in order to show the distance between the mere name and the real attribute. The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the noble verse by saying, ‘...and God gives provision to whom He wills without account.’ What is ‘provision’? They say that provision is everything that is beneficial so that everything from which you benefit is your provision. According to this definition, thieves consider ill-gotten gains to be provision; but it is unlawful provision.

People always reduce the word ‘provision’ to one thing which is always on their minds, namely ‘money.’ We say to them no; provision is everything which brings benefit, and everything which gives benefit, is part of provision: your knowledge is a kind of provision; your moral character is a kind of provision; your honour is a kind of provision, and everything you benefit from is provision. When you say that all of this is provision, consider God’s statement that those who are more abundantly favoured, are often unwilling to share their provisions with those whom their right hands possess so that they all might be equal in this respect (*an-Nahl*: 71).

It is as though God *the Most High* wants His creatures to share their provisions with others, and that everyone who has a distinction, and has more of some kind of provision, must share this with others; but people only understand provision to mean money; they do not understand that it means everything which is benefitted from.

If this is the case, then, what does ‘...and God gives provision to whom He wills without account’ mean? We must understand the word ‘without account’ on the basis that account requires one who reckons, and one who is reckoned, and that for which he is reckoned. In this light, for the words ‘without account,’ who reckons, and who is reckoned, and for what is he reckoned?

It is provision without account from God. God *the Most High* might give you provision according to your work, or He might give you more; and He gives provision without account because there is no power higher than Him which could say to Him, ‘Why did you give so-and-so more than he deserved?’

He grants provision without account because His stores are never exhausted; and He grants provision without account because no laws govern Him; He grants it by His Omnipotent Power. He *the Exalted* gives to the disbeliever

so that you might be confused by this and say, ‘Why does He give to the disbeliever and not the believer?’

If anyone is able to hold Him to account, let them ask Him why this is so. He repays good deeds seven hundredfold, beyond all reckoning. There can only be reckoning when you take something which is countable: if you take, for example, one hundred from one thousand, you subtract one countable from another, and so it must become less, and when you see it becomes less, you are afraid to give more. But God is not like this, for He gives that which is countable from that which is beyond counting.

So, when you read ‘without account’, say that if reckoning comes from God to others, he does not give according to a person’s labour, but rather gives them more than this; and He does not reckon Himself, nor could anyone else hold Him to account. God addresses mankind saying that all that is with them is bound to be exhausted, whereas that which is with God is everlasting (*an-Nahl*: 96).

So, the statement that ‘...God gives provision to whom He wills without account’ should make every person keep his good manners and hold his tongue when he sees that someone else has been granted more provision than he has; for he does not know God’s wisdom behind this. There are many people who, when God gives them a blessing, say, ‘Our Lord has honoured us,’ but when He takes this blessing from them they say, ‘Our Lord has humiliated us!’ About this, God *the Most High* says that man, whenever his Lord tries him by His generosity and by letting him enjoy a life of ease, he says, ‘My Lord has honoured me;’ and whenever He tries him by straitening his means of livelihood, he says, ‘My Lord has disgraced me’ (*al-Fajr*: 15-16).

You are wrong when you consider a favour to be an honour from God; and you are also wrong if you think that withdrawal of favour is a humiliation from God. A favour is an honour from God only if He gives you the success to use this favour well; and a favour is only a humiliation if God *the Most High* does not give you the success to fulfil the right of the favour – and the right of the favour is always to thank the One Who gave it, and not to be distracted by it from the One Who provided you with it.

We should understand also that God’s words ‘...and God gives provision to whom He wills without account’ can have another meaning which is that

He *the Exalted* does not like for you to estimate your provision by a reckoning based on your work alone; for a reckoning based on your work might be incorrect, like in the case of the farmer who sows crops and then estimates what his provision will be according to what grows from the land, but then a pestilence might come and take everything away, as we see happening sometimes, and in such a case the provision of the farmer at that time comes from a different source which he had never thought of. Because of this, a person must work using the means available to him, but he must not make a reckoning based on these means, thinking that this is his provision; for provision might come from a place which never entered into your reckoning or your accounts. About this the True Lord *the Most High* says that for whoever fears God, God will always grant him a way out of misery and provide for him from whence he has never expected (*at-Talaq*: 2-3).

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says to us in another verse something which clarifies and elucidates the matter of doctrine and the succession of messengers on earth, which began and then, continued successively from one messenger to the next. The True Lord *the Most High* says:

كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً فَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ النَّبِيِّنَ مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ وَأَنْزَلَ مَعَهُمُ
الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ فِي مَا اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ وَمَا اخْتَلَفَ فِيهِ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ
أُوتُوهُ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ بَغْيًا بَيْنَهُمْ فَهَدَى اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لِمَا
اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ مِنَ الْحَقِّ بِإِذْنِهِ وَاللَّهُ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٢١٣﴾

Mankind was a single community, then God sent prophets to bring good news and warning, and with them He sent the Scripture with the Truth, to judge between people in their disagreements. It was only those to whom it was given who disagreed about it after clear signs had come to them, because of rivalry between them. So by His leave God guided the believers to the truth they had differed about: God guides whoever He will to a straight path [213] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 213)

Someone might say: If the people were one community, and God *the Most High* links the coming and sending of the prophets to their being one community,

where did the conflicts in human life come from? We say: You must seek to explain this general verse in the light of another, specific verse, namely God's statement that mankind was but one community united in religion, but then, they differed; and if not for a word that preceded from the Lord, it would have been judged between them immediately concerning that over which they differed (*Yunus*: 19).

We must therefore take this verse in the light of the verse in the chapter of *Yunus*: when the True Lord *the Most High* addresses man, He addresses him in a way which will awaken his mind and his thought so that he can receive God's word with his entire intellect, and so that the whole Quran will be present in your mind, each part of it serving the other.

'Mankind was one community [before their deviation]; then, God sent the prophets....' Before God sent the Prophets, all mankind were one community who followed Adam *peace be upon him*. The True Lord *the Most High* imparted to Adam *peace be upon him* His way of guidance after He elected him and guided him, and Adam taught his children the Way of God, and his children continued to have faith in a single doctrine, and nothing happened between them to make their caprices differ; for the world was vast, and no one lived in it save Adam *peace be upon him* and his children alone, and the bounties of the world were more than enough for everyone in it. So there was no squabbling over anything, and if someone wanted something, he could just take it, and possession was shared between everyone because no one had any private ownership of anything. If someone wanted to build a house, he could build it, even if it took up two thousand acres; and if someone wanted to eat a fruit or a berry from any orchard, he could take whatever he wanted.

An example of this from our daily lives: The head of a household might bring twenty kilos of oranges and put them before his children. Each child wants one or more oranges, so, he takes what he wants without any problems, but if he had only bought one kilo of oranges, every child would only be able to take one orange.

So, mankind were one community, that is, there was no greed, and no desire to monopolise beneficial things that could make them clash. The root of conflict is greed for worldly pleasures, and this is where caprice comes in.

This should have been the case after Adam *peace be upon him* took the way of guidance from God *the Most High* and taught it to his children: they should all have accepted the Way. But one of his children rebelled against God's Way, and love of monopolising arose because of the scarcity of those beneficial things which were monopolised; and from here, conflicts arose. The story of Cain and Abel explains this to us: each one of them offered a sacrifice, and it was accepted from one of them, but was not accepted from the other. And Cain said, 'I will surely kill you.' Abel replied, 'God accepts only from those who fear Him' (*al-Ma'ida*: 27).

We know that Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* are the root of existence, and Eve *peace be upon her* bore a set of twins every time, and Adam *peace be upon him* wanted to marry them to one another. But how could they be married when they were all his children, and the children of a single generation, and each one of them knew the other as a sibling?

The Sacred Law dealt with this matter at that time by considering the division to be that of separate pregnancies; in other words, if two children were born from the same pregnancy, they were considered siblings, whilst if one was born before or after the other, they were not considered siblings. In this way, Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* would wed those children to one another who were not born from the same pregnancy, and the purpose of this separation was so that the woman would be considered as not a close relation of her brother.

It is related from Ibn Abbas and Ibn Mas'oud *God be pleased with them* that Adam *peace be upon him* used to marry the male of one pregnancy to the female of another, and that Abel wanted to marry the sister of Cain; and he was older than Cain, and Cain's sister was beautiful and Cain wanted to take her for himself instead of his brother. Adam *peace be upon him* ordered him to give her in marriage to Abel, but he refused, and so he ordered them both to make a sacrifice. Abel offered a fattened lamb, as he owned sheep, whilst Cain offered a bundle of his worst crop. A fire came down and consumed Abel's offering, and rejected Cain's offering, so, he was infuriated and said to his brother, 'I will kill you so that you cannot marry my sister.' Abel replied that God accepts only from those who fear Him (*al-Ma'ida*: 27). So, the origin of the first dispute between men was that two people competed to have complete possession over

something beneficial; and this was a clear example of what can happen when beneficial things are not sufficiently numerous to satisfy desires.

‘Mankind was one community....’ But they differed the moment they first began to seek to monopolise beneficial things, and every person came to have caprice. Had God willed to make the way of guidance He gave Adam *peace be upon them* last until the end of time, He would have done so, but in His Mercy, He knows that He created us, and He knows that we remember sometimes and forget at other times, and that we adhere sometimes and neglect at other times, and therefore God *the Most High* decreed to send His creatures the succession of messengers. This is what we understand from God’s words: ‘...then God sent the prophets as bringers of good tidings and warners...’. The purpose of giving glad tidings and warnings is that people remember that there is a paradise and a Hell, and so every messenger gives those who believe in him glad tidings of paradise and warns those of them who disbelieve of Hell. The True Lord *the Most High* reminds us that He made us all bear witness against ourselves of His Oneness, saying that He brought forth from the loins of the children of Adam their offspring and called upon them to bear witness about themselves that he was their Lord and they answered that they do bear witness to that. God reminds mankind of this lest they say on the Day of Resurrection that they were unaware of this; or lest they say that it was but their forefathers who, in times gone by, began to join idols with God, and that they were, but their late offspring; and they would ask God if He would destroy them for the doings of those inventors of falsehoods (*al-A‘raf*: 172-173).

God *the Most High* tells us that He *the Exalted* brought all of the progeny of Adam *peace be upon him* from their forebears to bear witness against themselves that God *the Most High* is their Lord and Sovereign, and that there is no god but He, just as He made it their natural disposition to do so. Then, after He sent them into existence through Adam *peace be upon him*, He came to the first man, Adam, and gave him His way of guidance at a time when caprice did not exist, and the way continued to be followed by the sons of Adam *peace be upon him*. After this, caprices grew numerous, and this only happens because of the desire to monopolise things of benefit, because of the fear that others will take them for themselves. So love of the self and egoism emerged, and when

things of benefit were not enough to satisfy all the desires of the people, the love of monopoly and ownership spread.

We find this matter clearly illustrated when commodities are readily available and abundant in the markets so that you can buy any commodity at any time you like, and you find it readily available. When this is the case, there is no crisis; but crises arise when the available quantity of the commodity is less than the needs of the people so that they struggle to claim it for themselves. In this way, we see that when beneficial things exist but are not enough to meet desires, problems arise.

It is of the mercy of the True Lord *the Most High* with mankind, and the perfection of His knowledge of the weakness of mankind before their own caprices and their desire to monopolise benefits, that He sent messengers to mankind to give glad tidings and warnings, '...and sent down with them the Book in truth to judge between the people about that in which they differed. And none differed over the Book except those who were given it - after the clear proofs came to them....' It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* did not want to leave mankind to disagree, but rather, it was their own heedlessness which created this disagreement '...out of jealous animosity among themselves....' From this wise statement, we know that disagreement only arose out of a will based on 'jealous animosity' and jealous animosity arises when a person seeks to take what is not rightfully his. Whenever each of us wants to take what is not rightfully his, it is inevitable that hatred will arise.

'...And God guided those who believed to the truth concerning that over which they had differed, by His permission....' That is, God *the Most High* guides those who believe, from every nation, in the messenger who came as a herald of glad tidings, a warner and a bearer of the way of the True Lord *the Most High* in order to judge between the people in the matter of those things about which they disagreed. Thus, the way of guidance remains dominant until such a long time passed that the soul becomes heedless, and desires begin to come and cause God's way to be forgotten, and caprices arise, whereupon God sends messengers to return the people to the upright way. This continued until the message of Islam came as a seal, and God *the Most High* sent our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to the entire world, and with this

the True Lord *the Most High* ensured for us that no further disagreement would arise about the essential matters; for if we were to disagree about the essential doctrine, there would happen to us that which happened to the nations who came before us: they disagreed, so, God sent to them messengers as heralds of glad tidings and warners. But the True Lord *the Most High* wanted the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to have a clear way which would protect them from disagreeing on the essential doctrine; and if people of the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* disagree, they must seek guidance from the true way embodied in the Quran and Sunna.

We know that one of the Prophet's distinctions is that he is truly the Seal of the Prophets, and you will not find, in the succession of messengers, any messenger whom God entrusted with establishing a new law which had not been revealed in the Book of God *the Most High* except our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. God gave our master the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* the mandate to issue laws on God's behalf, in light of how God made him infallible, as He *the Exalted* commanded the believers to accept willingly whatever the Messenger gives them and refrain from demanding anything that he withholds from them (*al-Hashr*: 7).

This is a clear command to the believers that they must obey the command of the Noble Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* because what he commands them to do is good and right, and that they must refrain from what he prohibits them because He *peace and blessings be upon him* only forbids those things which entail no good for the believers. And the True Lord *the Most High* commands all the believers to obey the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* because this is part of obedience to God, as he *the Exalted* says that whoever obeys the Messenger will be obeying God, and as for those who turn away, God had not sent the Messenger to be their keeper (*an-Nisa*': 80).

In this way we see that to obey the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is part of obeying God, and whoever refuses to obey him will be punished in the Hereafter. The True Lord *the Most High* emphasises coupling obedience to Him and obedience to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* when He commands His Messenger to proclaim to the believers to obey God and the

Messenger, and if they turn away, let them know that God does not love the infidels (*Al- 'Imran*: 32).

Thus we know that obedience of the Most Merciful entails obedience of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. So God gave His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* the mandate to legislate for mankind, and he *peace and blessings be upon him* does not speak out of his own desire.

Another distinction for the Islamic community is that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* left us the right to employ reasoning in those matters for which there came no text from the Quran or the *Sunna*, or for which there was a text, but it bore more than one interpretation. This means that the True Lord *the Most High* trusted the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to arrive, by the use of reasoning, to a decisive settlement to any disagreement, and that no disagreement would arise about the fundamental matters. Had God known from pre-eternity that we would disagree about the true doctrine, He would have sent new messengers to us.

We find that all the disagreements between the Muslim factions do not go outside the bounds of different understandings of the texts of the Quran or the Hadiths of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and that every Muslims seeks to derive his evidences from the Quran and *Sunna*.

This means that we have not abandoned the essentials, but rather, we each want to derive the correct ruling. Moreover, we find that some of the Muslims who could not find their evidence from the Quran and *Sunna* attempted to fabricate Hadiths which they ascribed to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* in order to base the ruling they wanted upon them. Such people are destined for Hell because they have ascribed words to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* which he never spoke, and have lied against him; and whosoever lies against him intentionally, let him take his place in hell.

So, our point of convergence is the Quran and the Prophetic *Sunna*; so, where is the problem? The problem is that people should be intelligent and have knowledge so that they know whether an argument based on the Quran is acceptable or not, and whether Hadiths which have been properly subjected to textual criticism exist or not.

So, the judiciousness of reasoning and opinion in the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* have made them trustworthy with every aspect of God's Way; and disagreements between them have not gone as far as was the case with the previous communities. But they must be vigilant, and ascend so that they can recognise those things which are not from the Quran, but which some people try to present as being from the Quran.

They must not explain the Quran by using their caprices, but rather by using what the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* brought so that their caprice will be in line with what he brought. We must be aware that God *the Most High* entrusted the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the Quran and the message of Islam, and the Quran and the message of Islam cannot be afflicted with alterations or corruptions; and all that is required, is that the believers be people of precision and sagacity so that if someone wants to abuse any temporal power, or fabricate a Hadith to promote his falsehood, the Muslims must uncover the evil intentions of this person.

We understand that God *the Most High* wanted Islam to support moral life, just as He willed water to support material life. In order for water to remain water, it must continue to be without flavour, colour, or smell. If you want to give it flavour, it loses its essential quality; it might become a drink, or juice, or the like. Some people might like a certain kind of juice, but everyone likes water because life is preserved by it. If you see a religion which has been coloured by a group, or an organisation, or a form, know that this is outside the sphere of Islam. Every group which wants to paint God's religion a certain colour, only thereby takes it out of its essential nature. This is why we find that our nation here in Egypt has preserved the sciences of Islam with the Noble Azhar University, and every Islamic scholar on the face of the earth is indebted to this noble university. And we find that we love the Household of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, but yet not one of us is Shi'ite, and at the same time, not one of us hates Abu Bakr or 'Umar *God be pleased with them*. This is Islam which cannot be coloured because Islam is the religion of man's instinctual disposition: '...the dye/religion of God. And who is better than God in giving a dye [ordaining religion]?...' (*al-Baqara*: 138).

So, those who try at any time to paint the religion with a particular form, or custom, or colour, or picture, or shape, we say to them: You want to take Islam away from the natural universality which God wants for it, and you must stop at the boundaries of the natural Islamic disposition, and not colour Islam in this way. In this way we will properly live up to God's words: '...And God guided those who believed to the truth concerning that over which they had differed, by His permission. God guides whom He wills to a straight path.' We know that guidance means that which leads to a goal, and when God *the Most High* speaks of guidance, we must be aware that guidance from God has two different meanings: The first meaning is direction to the path which leads to the destination, and the second meaning is assistance.

I gave previously an example for this: that of the traffic policeman who shows you the way to get to the place you want to go – this is an example of the first meaning of guidance; if you respect his words and follow them, he will give you some assistance by going with you or taking you to the place you want to get to – and this is the second kind of guidance. So what about the True Lord *the Most High*, Who has the highest example? He guides everyone, meaning He shows them the way; and for those who believe in Him and love Him, He guides them a second time by helping them with that which they have chosen for themselves. Some of us are amazed when we hear the words of the True Lord *the Most High* that He offered the tribe of Thamud guidance, but they chose blindness in preference to guidance; and so the thunderbolt of disgraceful suffering fell upon them as a result of all the evil that they had done, and God saved those who had believed and feared Him (*Fussilat*: 17-18).

Some of us might wonder: 'How can He *the Exalted* say that He guided them, and then say that they preferred blindness to guidance?' We say that the meaning of His having 'guided' them here is that he 'pointed the way' to them, but they preferred blindness to guidance; as for those who responded to the guidance of direction and believed, God aided them and saved them because they knew how to fear Him *the Exalted*.

We also hear some people saying: Since God guides whom He wills to a straight way, what is the fault of those whom He did not will to guide? We say: The True Lord *the Most High* guides whom He wills to a straight way, that is, He

points to them the way to guidance; and if someone follows the guidance of direction, God *the Most High* gives him more with the guidance of assistance, and facilitates the matter for him. We know that God *the Most High* negated the ability to give guidance for His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in one verse and then affirmed it for him in another even though it is a single action with a single doer. The True Lord *the Most High* negated it when He told His Messenger that he cannot guide aright anyone whom he loves (*al-Qasas*: 56). And then He *the Exalted* affirmed it for the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in another verse, where He said to him that he does guide to a straight path (*ash-Shura*: 52).

From this we understand that guidance is of two kinds: the guidance of direction, so he ‘guides’ inasmuch as he directs people to the way of goodness; and there is another form of conceptual guidance which is from God, and the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is not involved in it, and this is the guidance of assistance.

So, God’s words to His Messenger that he guides to a straight path (*ash-Shura*: 52) mean: You direct to the straight way, but God *the Most High* is the One who aids in this guidance, ‘...And God guides whom He wills to a straight path.’ So, we must consider all of the verses in which God *the Most High* stated His will to guide a believer and not to guide someone else. The True Lord *the Most High* says that He does not guide people who refuse to acknowledge the truth (*al-Baqara*: 264).

This means that God only guides those who believe in Him, and His guidance to the believers is by assisting them to continue to be guided; the guidance of direction came to everyone, but the True Lord *the Most High* distinguished the believers with the guidance of assistance. About this, the True Lord *the Most High* poses the rhetorical question on which is better: the one who has founded his building on God-fearing and His goodly acceptance or the one who has founded his building on the edge of a water-worn, crumbling river-bank so that it would tumble down with him into the fire of hell, and God does not grace with His guidance people who do wrong (*at-Tawba*: 109).

The True Lord *the Most High* clarifies for us the distinction between the one who founds the building of his life on God-fearing, seeking goodness and

paradise – and he is the one who followed the guidance of direction when it came to him, so, the guidance of assistance also came to him from God – and the one who founds the building of his life on the edge of a crumbling river-bank which is close to falling so that the building falls down with him to the fire of hell. He is the one who ignored the guidance of direction when it came to him so that the guidance of assistance would not come to him; this is the wrongful hypocrite who desires bad things to happen to the believers. The True Lord *the Most High* tells his Messenger that it does not matter whether he prays for the forgiveness of the staunch infidels, or does not pray for them; for even if he were to pray seventy times that they be forgiven, God will not forgive them, seeing that they insist on denying God and His Messenger; and God does not grant His guidance to wicked people (*at-Tawba*: 80).

The True Lord *the Most High* tells His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that however much he were to pray for the forgiveness of the hypocrites who pretended to be Muslims and concealed their disbelief, God *the Most High* would not forgive them. Why? That was because the guidance of direction came to them and they claimed to believe in it, and the guidance of assistance did not come to them because they disbelieved in God and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, and God does not guide such wicked people who in their hearts are outside the Way of God. After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَنْ تَدْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ وَلَمَّا يَأْتِكُمْ مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ خَلَوْا مِنْ
قَبْلِكُمْ مَسَّتْهُمُ الْبَأْسَاءُ وَالضَّرَاءُ وَزُلْزِلُوا حَتَّى يَقُولَ الرَّسُولُ وَالَّذِينَ
ءَامَنُوا مَعَهُ مَتَى نَصْرُ اللَّهِ أَلاَ إِنَّا نَصْرُ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ ﴿٢١٤﴾

Do you suppose that you will enter the Garden without first having suffered like those before you? They were afflicted by misfortune and hardship, and they were so shaken that even [their] messenger and the believers with him cried, ‘When will God’s help arrive?’ Truly, God’s help is near [214]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 214)

That is, did you suppose you would enter paradise without any trials coming to you? The True Lord *the Most High* negates this supposition, and says

that it is not so, but rather, the burdens of faith must be borne. If faith was a matter of words only, it would be easy; but what makes faith difficult is action, that is, making the soul follow the way of faith. Some of those who lived at the time of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* were too arrogant to utter the testimonial of faith: ‘There is no god but God,’ because they understood what its requirements were. If it were only a matter of speaking words with no actions to back them up, it would have been easy for them to say it; but they would not say the word without fulfilling its rights, so they knew very well that if they said, ‘There is no god but God,’ all of their previous beliefs would have come to an end. But they did not say it because they were loath and averse to living up to its rights, and fulfilling its requirements.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘Or do you think that you will enter paradise while such [trial] has not yet come to you as came to those who passed on before you? They were touched by misfortune and hardship....’ What is the relationship between this verse and the verses which came before it? The discourse before concerned the children of Israel who thought they would enter paradise without being tried first, and they came to have caprices with which they corrupted the Way of guidance. As for the community of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, they must prepare themselves for trials, and know how to bear hardships.

We know that in Arabic grammar, there are particles whose function is to negate and cause verbs to take the apocopate form. One of these particles of negation is lam, which means ‘did not,’ as in ‘Zaid did not attend,’ which refers to the past tense, as he might now be in attendance. But when you say ‘Zaid has not attended yet’ with the particle *lamma* (‘not yet’), the negation is still continuing now, that is, he has not come at the time of speaking, but his attendance and his coming is expected. We find this meaning in the statement of the True Lord *the Most High* that the Bedouins say that they have believed. Then He commands His Messenger to say to them that they have not attained faith yet; they should rather say that they have submitted (embraced Islam outwardly); for true faith has not yet entered their hearts (*al-Hujurat*: 14).

When the Bedouins heard this, they said, ‘We praise God, for there is still hope that we will attain faith.’ God wanted the Bedouins to be truthful with

themselves; according to some exegetes, this verse was revealed about some members of the tribe of Asad who came to Medina in a year of drought, and they testified before the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, saying 'There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.' They were seeking charity, and attempted to ingratiate themselves with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying that they had not fought him as others had. This verse came to clarify that faith is a higher level than merely displaying Islam, but this does not mean that they were hypocrites, which is why the Noble Quran clarified that displaying Islam, does not mean one has faith because faith is a matter of the heart.

They announced their intention to submit to God, and they wanted to do the same things the Muslims did, but this is not all that faith means. They said that they have believed, and the True Lord *the Most High* answered them: No; you have not yet attained faith, but be truthful to yourselves, for faith is an act of the heart; it cannot be said that you have attained faith because it is something in your heart. Rather say, 'I have submitted,' that is, have submitted and done what the believers do. Yet, as to whether you did this out of faith or not, this is something else.

Here, the verse says, '...do you think that you will enter paradise while such [trial] has not yet come to you as came to those who passed on before you?...' That is, you cannot enter paradise without first coming to you trials such as the ones that came to the communities who lived before you, and you must be tested and tried with misfortune and hardship, and those who are still firm after this, truly deserve to enter paradise. Do not think your community is different from any other community in the matter of being tested; you shall not enter paradise without being tried; on the contrary, your trials will be commensurate with your blessings.

You shall take a high rank amongst the communities, and therefore your trials must be commensurate with your rank. If you are people of a high rank, and shall carry the Final Message, and spread throughout the world, your trials must be commensurate with the immensity of your responsibility and your mission.

The verse says, '...while such [trial] has not yet come to you as came to those who passed on before you? They were touched by misfortune and hardship

and were shaken....’ God’s word ‘*lamma*’ (‘has not yet’) indicate that the trials which came to those who lived before them would also come to the believers.

When you reflect on God’s word ‘*zulzilu*’ (‘were shaken’), you will discover a unique onomatopoeic feature of the Arabic language, which is how the sound of the word expresses the meaning of the action. The verb *zulzilu* is derived from the word *zalzala* which is made of two parts: *zal* and *zal*. *Zal* means ‘to drop from one’s place’, or ‘to fall from one’s place’, and the second part has the same exact meaning, i.e. ‘to fall from one’s place’, so, the word as a whole gives us the meaning of a repeated fall, a first fall and then a second; and the second fall is not a continuation of the first fall, but rather, it is in an opposite direction. If it was in the same direction, it would be in sequence; but the second fall is in the opposite direction to the first fall, as though it tumbles to the right first, and then to the left.

Likewise, the word *khalkhala* (‘loosen by shaking’) means to move in two opposite directions: the first *khal* is to the right, and the second *khal* is to the left, and in this way the loosening (*khalkhala*) continues.

In this way, the meaning of the word *zalzala* has within it the element of the change of direction which is termed ‘inertia’. An example of this is what happens to someone when he is riding in a car and the driver forcefully and abruptly presses the brake. When this happens, the passenger is propelled forwards once and then backwards once; and perhaps the rear window of the car might break if the propulsion is strong enough. What is the cause of this propulsion? The cause is that the body of the passenger was set for moving forwards, and the driver stopped the car whilst the passenger was still set for forward motion, so, he rocks, and might bump into part of the car’s interior when it stops so suddenly. The action of ‘shaking’ (*zalzala*) is just like this, as something is made to rock back and forth or left and right, in any two opposite directions.

So, the term ‘...were shaken...’ means that they were stricken with the greatest calamity, recurring disastrously; and recurring not in the same pattern, but rather in numerous patterns: sometimes concerning faith, other times concerning misfortunes and events; and it kept recurring until the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and those who believed with him said: ‘When is the help of God?’ This was followed by the statement: ‘...Unquestionably, the help of God is near.’ Did they doubt at first, and then return to their senses and say to

themselves, '...Unquestionably, the help of God is near,' or is this a clarification that the matter swings back and forth between 'When is the help of God?' and '...Unquestionably, the help of God is near'?

At the time of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, the trials and tribulations reached their upmost limit, yet despite this, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and those with him continued to cling to their faith. Misfortune and hardship befell them, and they were shaken, that is, afflicted with a mighty upheaval which unsettled them so that the effects of this unsettling reached the point where '...the messenger and those who believed with him said, 'When is the help of God?' Unquestionably, the help of God is near.'

The form of this question 'When is the help of God?' means that help at first was seen to be slow in coming, and then, the glad tidings came after that with God's words: '...Unquestionably, the help of God is near,' and this was not due to any doubt or uncertainty in it. This worry about the slow coming of the help coupled with this expression of glad tidings, came in the midst of the violent shaking, when thoughts had become confused so that some people said 'When is the help of God?' whilst other voices in the midst of the battle responded to them, saying, '...Unquestionably, the help of God is near.'

The context of the verse indicates that the ones who said, 'When is the help of God?' were the Companions, and the one who said '...Unquestionably, the help of God is near' was the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The True Lord *the Most High* then discusses another matter, something which had become prevalent in this form, namely the questions of the believers about various things. This was a sound phenomenon of faith; and it was possible for the believers to refrain from asking about things for which no religious ruling had been issued, out of fear that the answer would lead to restriction of freedom. This is why the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said:

Leave me regarding those things which I have left [mentioning to] you; for those who came before you were only ruined by their excessive questioning and differing with their Prophets. If I command you with something, do it as well as you can; if I forbid you something, keep away from it.⁽¹⁾

(1) Narrated by Imam Muslim, *An-Nasa'i*, Ibn Maja, and Imam Ahmad in his *Musnad*, on the authority of Abu Hurayra God be pleased with him

Despite this, they would still ask about the most detailed aspects of life, and this phenomenon confirmed that they yearned for responsibilities from God; they wanted to base all their actions on Islam, and they wanted to ask about the ruling of Islam for every action so that they could act on its principles. The True Lord *the Most High* says:

يَسْأَلُونَكَ مَاذَا يُنْفِقُونَ قُلْ مَا أَنْفَقْتُمْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلِلْوَالِدَيْنِ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ وَالْيَتَامَى
وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ وَمَا تَفْعَلُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِهِ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢١٥﴾

**They ask you [Prophet] what they should give. Say,
‘Whatever you give should be for parents, close relatives,
orphans, the needy, and travellers. God is well aware of
whatever good you do [215] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 215)**

The question came from ‘Amr ibn Al-Jamuh, a very elderly man who said, ‘O Messenger of God, I have much money, so, how much charity should I give, and to whom should I give it?’ He was not only asking for himself, but was expressing the feelings of others as well, which is why the answer was in general terms, and did not refer to the questioner alone, but rather encompassed all believers.

The question was about ‘...what they should spend...’, so, it is as though they were asking about the thing to be spent. Spending on others (*infaq*), as we know, requires a spender, and a spent thing – namely money – and someone who is spent on. They asked about what they should spend on others, as though the matter of spending on others itself was a given, but they wanted to know what they should spend. So the question concerned that particular aspect, and the response answered that aspect and also something else.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘They ask you, [O Muhammad], what they should spend....’ This is the question, and the answer is: ‘...Say, “Whatever you spend of good is [to be] for parents....”’ A person of superficial understanding may say that the question is only about what should be spent, and may ask why the answer was about whom it should be spent on. We say: No; why have you forgotten that God says that the spending must be from that which is ‘good’ (*khair*, which means both ‘good’ and ‘wealth’ in Arabic)? The

money which is spent on others must be able to be described as having come from a good source.

After this, He elaborates and explains: As long as you believe that spending on others is obligatory, you must know what it is you should spend, and who deserve to be spent upon. ‘...Say, “Whatever you spend of good...”’ and *khair* means something good and beneficial. The ones to be spent upon are the members of the social circles of the one who spends, because God wants to make the believer responsible for his personal circles so that each circle will link with the other and all of society will become responsible for all of society; for when He *the Exalted* makes me responsible for my family, parents, and relatives, this is a means for the security of the family. We all have parents and relatives; my circle encompasses my parents and relatives, and then spreads to something else: orphans and the needy.

Take every person and gauge his circles of parents, relatives, and the orphans and needy around him, and you will find that the adjacent circles encompass all those in need, and all members of the society will be responsible for one another, and after this there will be no one left but those who are unable to work. We know that the one who asked this question was ‘Amr ibn al-Jamuh; and he had an amazing story: he was lame, and the lame are excused by God from having to participate in fighting, for there is no blame on the blind, the lame, or the sick for not taking part in fighting.

The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was about to go out to a battle when ‘Amr ibn Al-Jumuh came to him and said, ‘O Messenger of God, do not forbid me from struggling (in God’s Way), for my sons have forbidden me from going out to fight because of my lameness.’ The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* answered him, ‘God has excused you amongst those whom He excused.’ He said, ‘But Messenger of God, I would love to enter paradise by my lameness!’

This was the one who asked about what they should spend on others, and the answer came from the True Lord *the Most High*: ‘...Say, “Whatever you spend of good ...”’ that is, the money you give – for to spend means to give, and good (*khair*) here means money, and spending means all that money that goes out of a person’s possession in the form of a purchase, a gift, or a grant.

The root of the Arabic word *infaq* ('to spend') is the verb *nafaqa*, which means for a market to sell out: if you go to the market and find there are no goods left, this means that the market has sold out; whereas if you find the goods are piled up, this means that the market is still ongoing.

So, for a market to 'sell out' (*nafaqa*) means that all the goods go from it, just as life goes out of an animal which is why we also use the verb *nafaqa* to mean 'die'. The ways of spending were specified by God *the Most High* in saying, '...for parents and relatives and orphans and the needy and the wayfarer....' Is every orphan in need? An orphan might have inherited wealth, but we must understand that it is not only about fulfilling a needy person's need, but also about standing by a person who is weak in any way; for when a child is orphaned – although he may possess wealth – and then he sees you show him affection, he will feel as if his father has not died because his fatherhood remains in his believing brethren, and thereafter he will not grow up envying children whose parents are still alive. But if an orphan sees that every father is too busy with his own children to bother with orphans whose fathers have died, he will feel resentment, and the tendency to resent fate will develop in him, and he will feel: Why was I the one whose father died? But when he sees that all people are his parents, and they greet him with smiles, love, welcome and support, he will feel that when someone has one father the people leave him to rely on his father, but if his father dies, people turn to him with affection and love; and as a result of this, love will spread through the Islamic community, as will contentment and satisfaction with God's decree, and no one will object to the death of one's father; for when fate has taken his father, it has left for him many other fathers.

Those who neglect to show love and affection to an orphan just because his father left him enough money to suffice him – if they knew what spiritual benefits came from this affection, they would compete with one another to show him affection. It is not about material needs, but about spiritual needs.

I always say that we must instil in the youth the understanding that God never causes any of His creatures to die when there is a need for them in the world; consider this matter with respect to those around you, and you will find that someone dies and leaves behind young children, and so his family

and friends are saddened because he has left his young children, and then, they forget about it after this; and time passes, and then the people are surprised to find that this man's children have become the leaders of the neighbourhood. It is as though their father was blocking off their provision so that when the father died, God opened the stores of provision for the children; and this is so that no one becomes deluded by a material cause.

After spending on orphans, we find that we should then spend on the needy and the wayfarer. We know that the needy person is one who is in need, and that the wayfarer is the one who is cut off from his family and his wealth during travel. The True Lord *the Most High* concludes this verse by saying, '...And whatever you do of good, indeed, God has knowledge of it.' God wants to turn human nature to a concept, which is: Beware of seeking the reward for the good you do for these people from any human being, but rather seek it from God; and beware of trying to make yourself known to the people as someone who spends on near kin, orphans and wayfarers, for those to whom you wish to be known are not able to reward you, and their knowledge of you will not increase you in anything. It is enough for you that God knows what He has given you, and that which you have given from what He put you in charge of by way of seeking His pleasure. When people spend to please others, they will find ingratitude and denial in return so that the one who gives, has wasted what he spent, and only preserved the evil of those whom he spent upon.

If a Muslim, by spending and doing good, intended to seek the pleasure of the Sublime Creator *the Most High*, he would thereby preserve what he spent as good deeds and reward on the Day of Resurrection, and God would soften the hearts of those upon whom he spent with love and gratitude for the favour; and this is the justice of God which is manifested in that He does this with those who give ostentatiously, for they give, whilst having it in mind that they are giving only to the recipient; if they had given to God, the recipient would not have shown ingratitude for the favour they gave. You gave to them to please them, and so it is as though God is saying to you: I will leave you for them to reward you. This is why the one who gives charity secretly, will be one of the seven whom God will place in His shade on a Day when there is no shade but His; for amongst them are: '...A man who gives charity and

conceals it so that his left hand does not know what his right hand spends.⁽¹⁾ This is the best way to give supererogatory charity; as for the obligatory poor-due, it is better to give it publicly. The same is true in the case of prayer: it is better to perform the obligatory prayer publicly, whilst supererogatory prayers are best offered privately.

But if God *the Most High* is on your mind when you act, you will find the effect of the giving in the gratitude of the recipient. Beware of trying, even slightly, to make people aware that you are doing good deeds.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* brings back a topic that He had treated earlier in saying, ‘...and do not fight them at the Sacred Mosque, unless they fight you there...’ The True Lord *the Most High* brings back the subject of fighting, and speaks about the general principle of fighting, saying:

كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقِتَالُ وَهُوَ كُرْهُ لَكُمْ وَعَسَى أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ
وَعَسَى أَنْ تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢١٦﴾

Fighting is ordained for you, though you dislike it. You may dislike something although it is good for you, or like something although it is bad for you: God knows and you do not’ [216] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 216)

To hate fighting is a natural thing, a thing which the Creator of mankind acknowledges; therefore, He *the Exalted* does not treat the issue in a sophistic way, like saying, ‘Now what is wrong with fighting?’ No; the Creator says: I know that fighting is hateful, and so when you are afflicted by that which you hate, you know that the One Who legislated it, took this into account. Had the True Lord *the Most High* not said that fighting is hateful, people would have understood that God was presenting something difficult as though it were easy.

God *the Most High* is saying to those who believe: Know that you will have to undergo hardships and difficulties, and to leave your wealth, and leave your pleasures and comforts. This is why we find that the great leaders who excelled in politics and succeeded in leadership, did not like their peoples to

(1) Narrated by Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayra God be pleased with him

enter battles unless they were forced to; and when they were forced to, they would make it clear to their armies that they were fighting to ward off that which was even worse than fighting. This means that they mobilised the human soul so that it could face the situation with all its power, and all its faculties, and all its will.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'Fighting has been ordained for you even though it is hateful to you....'; He *the Exalted* is saying to us: I know that fighting is hateful to you, but I want to instil a concept in you, which is that you cannot judge the great issues with your own knowledge because your knowledge is always imperfect; rather, take issues according to My Own knowledge; for I might ordain something hateful, but then good comes from it, whilst you might see something as beloved, yet, evil comes from it. For this reason, the True Lord *the Most High* alerts us to the fact that there are many things which we love and yet, they bring us evil so that one of us might say, 'I was expecting something good from this, but it brought me evil instead.'

And there are other things which you think will bring evil, yet they bring good. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* leaves clues in society so that people can be sure that God *the Most High* does not make goodness proceed according to the requisites and standards of human knowledge, but rather, the judgement proceeds according to the requisites, standards and knowledge of the Lord of mankind. Let us consider, for instance, what the True Lord *the Most High* says about this as an example to mankind in the story of Moses and his servant during their wanderings: Moses said to his servant that he will not give up his journey until he reaches the junction of the two seas, even if he has to spend many years in his quest. But when they reached the junction between the two seas, they forgot all about their fish, and it took its way into the sea and disappeared from sight. And after the two had walked some distance, Moses asked his servant to bring them their lunch as they have indeed suffered hardship on that day of their journey. The servant told Moses that when they took rest at that rock he forgot about the fish and that was the doing of none but Satan, and the fish strangely took its way into the sea. Moses exclaimed that that was the place they were seeking; and the two turned back, retracing their footsteps (*al-Kahf*: 60-64).

Moses *peace be upon him* was heading with his servant to the junction of the two seas, which is said to be somewhere in the east, and they had with them some food, namely a salted fish. But the journey and the hardship made them forget the fish, and by a sign from God, the fish found its way back to the sea. When Moses *peace be upon him* arrived at the junction of the two seas, he asked his servant to bring them the food after this long toil, but the boy told Moses *peace be upon him* that he had forgotten the fish, and that none but Satan had made him forget it, and that the fish had made its way back to the sea. Moses *peace be upon him* said, ‘This is the sign we were looking for to tell us that we had reached our goal, the junction of the two seas.’ That is, ‘What happened with the fish, and how it was lost, were what we have been seeking – the sign they were waiting for; and the man whom we have come to see is there in that place.’ So, Moses *peace be upon him* and the servant turned and retraced their steps.

So, what happened? Moses *peace be upon him* met the righteous servant al-Khidr *peace be upon him*, who was one of the Friends of God to whom God had taught from the Lordly knowledge which He grants to His pious servants as a fruit of their sincerity and God-fearing. Moses *peace be upon him* asked this godly servant, our master Al-Khidr *peace be upon him*, to teach him something of the guidance he possessed. But this godly servant, to whom God had given knowledge which was beyond the cognisance of human capability, said to Moses *peace be upon him* that he will never be able to have patience with him, as how could he be patient about something that he cannot understand within the compass of his experience (*al-Kahf*: 67-68).

Moses *peace be upon him* had already known that losing the fish was something which appeared to be bad, but was actually good because this was the way and the sign by which Moses *peace be upon him* could recognise how to reach the righteous servant. The very same concept continues in the story of Moses and the righteous servant: events which seemed to be evil but which were actually good, whether it be story of the boat which he breached, or the lad whom he killed, or the wall which he rebuilt. The knowledge of the righteous servant was Lordly knowledge, which is why Moses *peace be upon him* wanted to learn some of this knowledge; but the righteous servant had warned Moses *peace be upon him* that what he might see, would be beyond the limits of

his patience, for the things which Moses *peace be upon him* would see, would appear to be evil to him, when actually they were good.

Moses *peace be upon him* agreed to take the position of a student and have proper manners with his teacher to whom God had given this Lordly knowledge; and the righteous servant stipulated that Moses *peace be upon him* must not ask about anything until he himself gave him an account of it. Moses and the righteous servant *peace be upon them* came across a boat, and boarded it, and then the righteous servant damaged the boat, and Moses *peace be upon him* asked him why he made a hole in it – was it to drown the people in it? Indeed, he has done a grievous thing (*al-Kahf*: 71). The righteous servant replied by asking Moses: Had he not told him that he will never be able to have patience with him? (*al-Kahf*: 72). Moses *peace be upon him* recalled that he had promised the righteous servant *peace be upon him* to be patient; but what could Moses have done when he saw the righteous servant *peace be upon him* breaching a boat which was carrying them in the sea? This is something difficult for the soul, and so Moses *peace be upon him* asked the righteous servant not to take him to task for having forgotten, and not to be hard on him on account of what he has done (*al-Kahf*: 73).

Moses *peace be upon him* returned to the promise which he had made to the righteous servant, and asked him only not to burden him with things beyond his capability. The righteous servant *peace be upon him* set off again with Moses *peace be upon him*, and the righteous servant *peace be upon him* found a lad and killed him, whereupon Moses *peace be upon him* asked him why he had killed an innocent soul without him having killed another person. Indeed, he has done a deplorable thing (*al-Kahf*: 74).

The righteous servant *peace be upon him* reminded Moses *peace be upon him* that he would not be able to have patience with him, and Moses *peace be upon him* apologised for what he had not known. The righteous servant *peace be upon him* continued on with Moses *peace be upon him* until they reached a village whose inhabitants they asked for hospitality, but the people of the village refused to provide it to them, and then the righteous servant *peace be upon him* found in it a wall which was about to fall down and began to rebuild it, whereupon

Moses *peace be upon him* told the righteous servant that had he so wanted, surely he could have obtained some payment for it (*al-Kahf*: 77).

This spelt the parting of ways between the righteous servant and Moses *peace be upon them*, and the righteous servant *peace be upon him* informed Moses *peace be upon him* of what he had no knowledge and had not borne patiently: the boat was breached to save its owners from having it seized from them, for there was a king who was wont to seize every good boat by brute force, so, he wanted to damage it so that the king would leave those needy people alone.

And the killing of the youth was a mercy for his believing parents, as their son would bring them wickedness and disbelief, and God *the Most High* wanted to give them something better in his stead.

And the wall which he rebuilt stood over a treasure which belonged to two orphans from that village whose father had been a righteous man, so, the wall had to be rebuilt until the boys came of age, so they could dig up their treasure. And as God *the Most High* tells us, the righteous servant said that he had not done any of this of his own accord; that was the real meaning of all those events that Moses was unable to bear with patience (*al-Kahf*: 82).

The righteous servant did not ascribe these Lordly acts to himself, but ascribed them to the Creator who had taught him. So the True Lord *the Most High* disposes of some of the matters of existence in such a way to show man that goodness does not always lie in that which he loves, nor does evil reside in that which he hates. This is why He *the Exalted* says, ‘...but it may well be that you hate a thing while it is good for you; and it may well be that you love a thing while it is bad for you....’ Although fighting is hateful for you, it may well be that it is good for you. Since hatred is mentioned, we clarify that in Arabic there are two words, *karh* and *kurh*. *Karh* means something hateful which you are forced and compelled to do, whilst *kurh* means something which is arduous.

Something might be hateful, whilst it is not arduous, or it might be arduous but not hateful. The True Lord *the Most High* says ‘Fighting has been ordained for you even though it is hateful to you....’ We can observe that when the

True Lord *the Most High* issues some legislation, He always uses a passive form ('is/has been ordained'), not the active form 'I have ordained.' This is so that we understand that God only legislates for those who believe in Him; He has not ordained any responsibilities for the disbeliever. But is it logical for God to hold those who believe in Him morally responsible, whilst leaving the disbeliever with no responsibilities?

Yes, it is logical because moral responsibility is a good thing. Some people might look at moral responsibility as being restrictive. We say to them: If the moral responsibilities of faith are restrictive, God would have charged the disbeliever with them; but God only holds those whom He loves morally responsible, and He *the Exalted* only commands that which is good. Moreover, God only holds those who believe in Him to be morally responsible because the believing servant is in a covenant of faith with his Lord.

So, when God *the Most High* says 'has been ordained', this means that He is implying that He did not infringe upon anyone's freedom of choice which was given to them; God *the Most High* left people the freedom to choose whether to believe or not to believe. Those who believe freely and dutifully thereby enter into a covenant of faith with God, and as a consequence of this covenant, God ordained moral responsibilities for them. One of these moral responsibilities is fighting, and therefore He *the Exalted* says, 'Fighting has been ordained for you....'

His words 'for you' (*'alaykum*, literally 'upon you') mean that when fighting is ordained, on the surface it seems like nothing but an arduous task, so, the word *'alaykum* is used to reflect this. Yet after the fighting is over, if we have gained victory, we will take the spoils, whilst if we have been defeated and martyred, we will enter paradise.

The True Lord *the Most High* speaks about the outward appearance of fighting, so, He says, '...even though it is hateful to you; but it may well be that you hate a thing while it is good for you; and it may well be that you love a thing while it is bad for you....' As we have said, this is a general matter, which is why we should refer it to the one who knows: '...and God knows, whereas you do not know.' We must refer everything to the wisdom of God Who ordained it, for He is the One Who knows.

There is a folk tale which tells the story of a man from China who owned a great expanse of land with many horses, and there was one stallion out of all these which he loved dearly. One day this horse went out into the pasture and did not return, and so the man grieved for it. The people came to him to console him over the loss of his horse, but he smiled and said, ‘What makes you think this is a bad thing, for which I need your consolation?’

After a while, the man was surprised by the return of the horse along with several other horses which it brought with it. When the people saw this, they came to congratulate him, and he said to them, ‘What makes you think this is a good thing?’ So, the people refrained from congratulating him. After this his son mounted the horse, but it reared and threw him, and he fell and broke his leg. The people came once again to console the man, but he said, ‘What makes you think this is a bad thing?’ It happened after this that a war broke out, and the government drafted all the young men of the land to fight in the army, but they left the man’s son because his leg was broken. The people came to congratulate him, but he said to them, ‘What makes you think this is a good thing?’

The lesson is that we must not judge everything by its outward appearance as to whether it is good or bad, but rather, we must take every matter of life in light of the teaching of the True Lord *the Exalted*: that we should not despair over whatever good has escaped us nor exult unduly over whatever good has come to us (*al-Hadid*: 23).

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...and God knows, whereas you do not know.’ God is beyond compare, however an example we have given before serves to illustrate the situation: The example of the loving man who loves his only son and hopes for a long life for him. When the son gets ill, the father gives him bitter medicine. When he is given the medicine, the son hates it, but it is good for him.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* answers another question:

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الشَّهْرِ الْحَرَامِ قِتَالٍ فِيهِ قُلْ قِتَالٌ فِيهِ كَبِيرٌ وَصَدُّ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ
وَكُفْرٌ بِهِ وَالْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَإِخْرَاجُ أَهْلِهِ مِنْهُ أَكْبَرُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَالْفِتْنَةُ
أَكْبَرُ مِنَ الْقَتْلِ وَلَا يَزَالُونَ يُقِنُّونَكُمْ حَتَّى يَرْضَوْكُمْ عَنْ دِينِكُمْ إِنْ أَسْتَطَعُوا
وَمَنْ يَرْتَدِدْ مِنْكُمْ عَنْ دِينِهِ فَيَمُتْ وَهُوَ كَافِرٌ فَأُولَئِكَ حَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ
فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَأُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿٢١٧﴾

They ask you [Prophet] about fighting in the prohibited month. Say, ‘Fighting in that month is a great offence, but to bar others from God’s path, to disbelieve in Him, prevent access to the Sacred Mosque, and expel its people, are still greater offences in God’s eyes: persecution is worse than killing.’ They will not stop fighting you [believers] until they make you revoke your faith, if they can. If any of you revoke your faith and die as disbelievers, your deeds will come to nothing in this world and the Hereafter, and you will be inhabitants of the Fire, there to remain [217] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 217)

The question here is not about the sacred month because it was well known to them from the days of pagan ignorance. Rather, the question was about fighting in the sacred month – so, what was the use of the question? It was a provocative question, and there is a story behind it. We know that there are twelve months in the year, and that God made four of them sacred: One stands alone, namely *Rajab*, whilst the others are consecutive, namely *Dhu Al-Qi‘da*, *Dhu Al-Hijja*, and *Muharram*. The meaning of ‘sacred months’ is that fighting is prohibited in those months.

God *the Most High* knew how human beings have pride in front of one another, and so He gave them a cover to shield their pride. One of these ways which God *the Most High* instituted is the prohibition of fighting in the sacred months and the sacred places. War may harm the warrior, but his pride in front of his enemy does not allow him to stop fighting, so he continues to wage war no matter what the cost. So the True Lord *the Most High* says to the warriors: Cease fighting in these months, for I have made fighting in them unlawful. The warriors themselves might have been longing in their hearts for

someone to come and stop the war, but their pride did not let them back down. When the verdict of Heaven intervened, both sides would have a reason to back down whilst preserving their reputations. Likewise, God *the Most High* made certain places sacred, and prohibited fighting within them so that people would say that it was God who prohibited it and would thereby have a means of safeguarding their pride.

So, the True Lord *the Most High*, Who created man, wanted to protect man so that blood would be spared. When people went without fighting for three months, and then another month, they would enjoy in this time peace, tranquillity, and calm, and might thereby become used to peace and not think of waging war again. But if war continued without pause, the lust for war would remain in their souls; and this is the special nature of the sacred months.

The sacred months are sacred in time and place, for time and place are the loci for all events. Every event requires a time and place, and when the time and place are made sacred, both sides of the fighting can grasp the opportunity for calm.

The True Lord *the Most High* deals here with an issue which the enemies of Islam, the disbelievers of Quraysh and the Jews, wanted to stir up. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* used to send squadrons to scout, a squadron being a specific number of soldiers. Once the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* sent a squadron led by ‘Abdullah ibn Jahsh Al-Asadi, the paternal cousin of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, sending eight others with him and making him their commander. He gave him a written message and told him not to open it until two days’ journey had passed so that no one would know where the squadron was heading, which was a precaution to keep the information secret.

After the squadron had travelled for two nights, Abdullah opened the message and read it; it read: ‘Go to Batn Nakhla’ – a place between Mecca and Ta’if – ‘and scout the caravan of Quraysh, and do not force any of those with you to go unwillingly.’ This meant that each one of them had the freedom to do as he wished, and so if anyone did not want to go with the squadron, they had the right not to go.

Whilst they were on the way, a camel belonging to Sa’d ibn Abu Waqqas and ‘Uqba ibn Ghazwan went missing, so, they set out to search for the

camel, and the remaining six soldiers stayed with 'Abdullah. These six went to Batn Nakhla and found 'Amr ibn Al-Hadrami with three others with a caravan belonging to Quraysh. They began to battle them, thinking that the day was the last day of the month of *Jumada Al-Akhira* when in fact they realised later that it was the first day of *Rajab*, that is, a day of the sacred month.

The Muslim warriors killed Ibn Al-Hadrami; it was Waqid ibn 'Abdullah, one of the companions of 'Abdullah ibn Jahsh, who killed him. They took two of those who were with him prisoners, and one got away. When this happened, and they knew they had done it on the first of *Rajab*, they realised that their fighting and spoils taking had violated the sanctity of the month of *Rajab*.

The event caused disagreements among the Muslims before Quraysh spoke about it, saying, 'Muhammad claims that he respects sacred things, and respects the sacred months, yet, despite this, he fought in the sacred month, and spilled our blood, and plundered our wealth, and took men captive.' So the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* refrained from taking the spoils and the captives until God had passed judgement on the matter, and then, the ruling of Heaven on the matter was revealed with these noble words: 'They ask you about the sacred month - about fighting therein. Say, 'Fighting therein is great [sin], but averting [people] from the way of God and disbelief in Him and [preventing access to] the Sacred Mosque and the expulsion of its people therefrom are greater [evil] in the sight of God. And *fitnah* (oppression/trial) is greater than killing.' And they will continue to fight you until they turn you back from your religion if they are able. And whoever of you reverts from his religion [to disbelief] and dies while he is a disbeliever - for those, their deeds have become worthless in this world and the Hereafter, and those are the inmates of the fire, they will abide therein eternally.'

We allow that fighting in the sacred month is a great sin, but look, o disbelievers of Quraysh what you have done with Our servants and compare the enormity of this with the enormity of that. You say that fighting in the sacred month is a great sin, but your turning men away from the Way of God and disbelieving in Him, and your barring the Muslims from going to the Sacred Mosque and your expelling the people of Mecca from it is all graver in the sight of God than fighting in the sacred month. Do not do what is even worse than killing in the sacred month, and then, become jealously protective of sacred things!

It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to make something plain, which is: Do not take individual religious matters and use them to hide behind a word of True Lord *the Most High* while you intend falsehood, for reality shows the truth of things. We say: Yes, fighting in the sacred month is a great sin, but you, O Quraysh, should know that to oppress the believers in the matter of their religion and to turn them away from the path of God, and your disbelief in Him *the Exalted*, and your violation of the sanctity of the Sacred Mosque (*Ka'ba*) by worshipping other than God in it as you do, and your expelling its people there from – all of these wicked things are more grievous and more wicked in God's sight than fighting in the sacred month in order that the Muslims might reclaim from you some of that which is rightfully theirs.

So, God *the Most High* directs the accusation of the idolaters right back at them. '...And they will continue to fight you until they turn you back from your religion if they are able...' That is, beware of imagining that they will respect either the sacred month or the sacred place: rather, they '...will continue to fight you...' that is, they will insist on, and continue in, fighting you '...until they turn you back from your religion if they are able...'

Reflect on His words 'if they are able.' This is a challenge to them that they will never be able to do this, for the word 'if' always refers to doubtful things. The True Lord *the Most High* continues to say, '...And whoever of you reverts from his religion [to disbelief] and dies while he is a disbeliever - for those, their deeds have become worthless in this world and the Hereafter, and those are the inmates of the Fire, they will abide therein eternally.' They will continue to fight you until they turn you away from your faith, if they can. The True Lord *the Most High* then concludes the verse by referring to the following issue: '...And whoever of you reverts from his religion [to disbelief]...' This verse is complemented by another in which the True Lord *the Most High* explains that whoever rejects belief, in vain will be all his works: for in the life to come, he shall be among the lost (*al-Ma'ida*: 5).

If we compare the two verses, we find that the verse which we are currently examining contains the words '...and dies while he is a disbeliever...' whilst in the verse in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida* this is not mentioned; but rather, it says that whoever rejects belief, in vain will be all his works (*al-Ma'ida*: 5).

Scholars have differed in interesting ways about this issue, but they are all in agreement, first of all, that if anyone leaves Islam and then dies, whilst outside Islam, all his works will come to naught. Their point of difference, however, is as to whether, if he returns once more to faith and so does not die as a disbeliever, but rather returns to faith after his apostasy, will his actions have come to naught or not?

Imam Ash-Shafe'i was of the opinion that if someone apostatises from religion, his works will come to naught if he dies in a state of disbelief, but if he returns and embraces Islam again the works he did before he apostatised will be counted for him. Imam Abu Hanifa had a different view, saying: No; the verse in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida* does not say '...and dies, while he is a disbeliever...', which means that we should apply this to the verse in the chapter of *al-Baqara* which mentions this, by way of applying the general to the specific; and in this case, if someone disbelieves after having had faith, his actions come to naught whether he returns to faith after this or not, and he will not have any works counted for him.

What, then, is the point of difference? Suppose that a person has faith and performs the obligation of the pilgrimage, and then – God forbid – apostatises and disbelieves, and then returns to faith, will the pilgrimage he performed before he apostatised remain for him, or will it be counted as naught so that he has to perform pilgrimage again? This is the point of difference; Ash-Shafe'i sees that his actions do not come to naught as long as he has returned to faith because God *the Most High* says, '...and dies while he is a disbeliever...', which means that if he does not die upon disbelief, his actions do not come to naught, but he will gain no reward for the pilgrimage which he performed before. Imam Ash-Shafe'i *God be pleased with him* paid attention to something which many people might neglect, which is that pilgrimage is one of the Pillars of Islam, and the one who does not perform the pilgrimage, whilst he is capable of doing so, will be punished by God for his negligence, whilst the one who performs the pilgrimage, will not be punished, but rather rewarded for his action.

It is as though if you do not do the things which the True Lord *the Most High* requires of you if you are able to do them, you will be punished, whilst if you do them, your action will pass through two stages: The first stage is that you

will not be punished, and the second stage is that you will be rewarded for your action. Ash-Shafe'i *God be pleased with him* said the one who does something for which people are rewarded, and then, disbelieves, and then, returns to Islam, he will not be punished, but he will not be rewarded either. As for Imam Abu Hanifa *God be pleased with him*, he said that the works which come before apostasy are totally fruitless, in accordance with God's judgement that in vain will be all his works, that is, they will be annulled, and will vanish as though they never existed.

The Quran uses the word *habita* ('have become worthless') here, which is used as an allusion to a tangible matter, as the verb *habita* literally means for an animal to be afflicted with an illness called *hubat* which is caused by its having eaten a kind of food which causes it to swell up and possibly die. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Some of that which spring produces can cause death by swelling, or almost cause it.'⁽¹⁾

He *peace and blessings be upon him* is warning us here that evil might be concealed in what is good, such as that which occurs in spring when certain plants grow which animals like to eat, but which cause them to become bloated (*hubat*) so that they swell up and die, or almost die. Likewise, the works which the disbelievers do will become on the surface like a swollen belly, yet, all these works will perish just as the animal which eats this kind of plant perishes its stomach swelling up so that the onlooker might think it is fat, after which he is surprised to learn that it is ill. With these words, God gave us the concrete concept because of the similarity between the two images; when the animal swells up it looks as though it has grown and fattened, but its growth is abnormal – it is not fat or meat, but rather, distension. Likewise, the works of those who disbelieve are in vain, even though it seems to them that they have done great works which on the outside appear to be good and sound.

Some people say: 'Does it make sense that those disbelievers who made great accomplishments from which all humanity benefited should have their works end up like this? They found cures for malignant diseases and eased people's pain, and built machines which brought comfort and benefit to all

(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari, At-Tirmidhi, and Ibn Maja.

people.' We say to those who have these kinds of opinions: Wait a moment. There is something which we must first agree upon, which is that when someone performs an action he seeks reward from the one for whom he performs it. Did all these people act whilst thinking of God, or were they thinking of humanity, glory and fame? Humanity gave them glory and fame, and as long as they received this reward in this life, they should not expect any reward in the Hereafter. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* says that the deeds of the infidels 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 God there, and He will pay him his account in full – for God is swift in reckoning (*an-Nur*: 39).

The disbeliever thinks that his works are good and beneficial, but in the Hereafter, they will be like the mirage which one sees in the desert and thinks it to be water, and then, he will find himself in the Hereafter at the moment of reckoning, and God will give him his reckoning with punishment; and they will have no reward save hell, and the same will apply to them as applies to all those who disbelieve in God *the Most High*, which is: '...and those are the inmates of the fire, they will abide therein eternally.'

This being said, the True Lord *the Most High* clarifies the truth of the matter to those who believe in Him and in His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in order to give them immunity of faith against the disbelievers' hopes of harming the believers, so, He teaches us that they will never relent until they have made you turn away from your religion; for the way of God always scares those who are on the side of falsehood alone. The well-organised and balanced person who wants to live in the world with peace and take goodness in accordance with his work in life, will not be alarmed by the ascendancy of the principles of Islam, but the principles of Islam only alarm those who want to usurp the fruits of the labours of others, and they try their utmost and use all the means at their disposal to make the Muslims leave their religion. But will God *the Most High* allow them to do this? No; for there will always be hope for goodness if the Islamic community hold fast to the way of the truth.

He *the Most High* gives an immunisation to the believers; and as we know, immunisation means to give a healthy person microbes of an illness in a weakened state so that, his immune system has an opportunity to defeat these microbes. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* says to them, ‘...And whoever of you reverts from his religion [to disbelief] and dies ,while he is a disbeliever - for those, their deeds have become worthless in this world and the Hereafter....’ The essential difference between the believer and the disbeliever is that the believer only does good deeds with the intention that the One Who will reward them is God, and has a sincere intention in everything he does, and utilises God’s means of knowledge so that others can benefit from it, and the benefit is all-encompassing and vast. The believer should be the first to make discoveries and inventions and revive the Muslim world, and the believing scientist should be a beacon which shines the light of faith before the people, not simply leave the disbelievers to make all the scientific discoveries whilst he is indifferent and lazy.

The believer must take the means God *the Most High* provides him with in life because Islam encompasses both the religious and worldly life, and it is the religion of knowledge and progress, and it secures for the one who follows its way the happiness of this world and the happiness of the Hereafter. If the believer enjoys products made by disbelievers, he should know that the disbelievers have taken their reward from those for whom they worked; as for the believer, when he excels in industry, agriculture, science and discoveries, he will take reward in this life and in the Hereafter because the One Who gives it in this case will be God.

As for the deeds of the disbeliever, they are deeds from a coerced and subjugated thing such as a tool, a mineral, a plant, or an animal, subjugated to serve mankind. If God distinguished the believer from the disbeliever with reward in this life and the best reward in the Hereafter, does it not befit the believer to outstrip the disbeliever in developing Islamic society, and be, by means of his works, a guiding beacon for those around him?

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا وَجَاهَدُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ
 أُولَٰئِكَ يَرْجُونَ رَحْمَتَ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ عَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

**But those who have believed, migrated, and striven for
 God's cause, it is they who can look forward to God's
 mercy: God is most forgiving and merciful [218]
 (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 218)**

The verse mentions three categories of people: the first category is those who have believed, the second is those who have emigrated and the third is those who struggle. Those who believe with a faith which is sincerely devoted to God, and emigrate to give support to the religion, and struggle for the sake of making the word of Islam ascendant, they do all this looking forward to the mercy of God. Someone might wonder: Is mercy not something absolutely assured for these people? We say: Nothing from God *the Most High* is absolutely certain for the servant because you might forget about some of your sins for which you have not made proper repentance, nor desisted from. You must always keep this in mind, and make sure that you have a sincere intention for God in everything you do; for your soul might suggest something to you which spoils your action. This is why the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, the master of mankind and the master of all who are connected with their Lord said: 'O God, I seek refuge in You from knowledge which gives no benefit, and a deed which is not raised, and a prayer which is not heard.'⁽¹⁾

The Noble Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, the master of all those who are sincere in all that he did, taught us that the soul might cause one to do something which spoils the act of obedience. The Muslim should always be hopeful, and the believer who has trust in his Lord should not say: God has to do such-and-such for me; because the basis of your worship of God has already been recompensed, and anything else you receive after this is a favour from God upon you. Your worship was recompensed by the fact that you were brought into existence out of nothing and given sustenance out of

(1) Narrated by Ahmad, Al-Hakim and Ibn Hibban on the authority of Anas God be pleased with him.

nothing, and it was recompensed by the fact that God gave you to enjoy all kinds of things. If you compare this with what God asks of you – even supposing that you gained no benefit from it – you have already benefitted from what He gave to you first, and any good that comes to you after this is a favour from God to you; and favours are hoped for, not expected with certainty.

The magnificence of the True Lord *the Most High* is that you call upon Him with both fear and desire. The example often given – and God is beyond compare – is that the greatness you ascribe to your father lies in the fact that that you have a father whom you fear, and who you hope will help you attain some of your ambitions. If one of these two aspects were absent, the whole essence of the father-son relationship will be absent.

Likewise, the greatness of the Lord inspires both fear and desire; if you desire Him, but do not fear Him, your faith is deficient; and if you fear Him, but do not desire Him, your faith is also deficient. Therefore, the two must coexist: fear and desire. If a person considered with insight the things which God has obliged him to do as religious responsibilities, he would find that he benefits many times over from these responsibilities. Everything which God gives His servants as reward is only favour and surplus; and every provision given to mankind is pure favour, and pure favour is hoped for, not expected.

The True Lord *the Most High* commands the believers to call their Lord humbly, and in the secrecy of their hearts. Indeed, He does not love those who transgress the bounds of what is right; and do not spread corruption on earth after it has been so well ordered. And call Him with fear and longing: indeed, God's grace is ever near to the doers of good (*al-A'raf*: 55-56).

The whole world is subjugated by the Power of the Most Merciful and His will, and He can do whatever He wants with everything in existence, and He is the Splendid Creator. Therefore, one should call upon God with humility and submission in private and in public; and the True Lord *the Most High* does not love those who transgress by speech, or by being ostentatious, or by harming others.

Faith must be sincerely devoted to God so that man does not corrupt the earth with idolatry or disobedience; for the True Lord *the Most High* has set in

place, the true way to reform the world, which is the Quran and the Message of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*; and God's mercy is near to those who obey the True Lord *the Most High*.

One aspect of the greatness of the Lord is that He is both feared and desired; if you desire Him but do not fear Him, your deed will not be accepted, and if you fear Him, but do not desire Him, your deed will not be accepted. Desire and fear are both required together, which is why the believer who strives in the cause of God looks forward to God's mercy.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...those hope for the mercy of God....' What is mercy? Mercy is that you are spared from being subjected to pain from the outset. The True Lord *the Most High* says that through the Quran, He bestows all that gives health to the spirit and is a mercy to those who believe (*al-Isra'*: 82).

Giving health means that you were afflicted with an illness and then, God cures you of it, but mercy means that the illness does not afflict you in the first place. '...And God is Forgiving and Merciful.'

God *the Most High* knows that not all of His servants are free of sin, and if He were to reckon us with completely strict standards some of us would suffer, which is why I always love to make this supplication with my brethren: O God, with grace, not justice; and with kindness, not with the balance; and with clemency, not with strictness. That is, treat us with grace and not justice, and with Your kindness and not with the balance because the balance would be hard for us.

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us that admittance to paradise is not attained by works alone, but rather by God's grace, mercy and forgiveness. The Noble Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'None of you shall enter paradise by his acts.' His companions asked, 'Not even you, o Messenger of God?' He answered, 'Not even me, unless God enfolds me in His mercy.'⁽¹⁾

So, the believer has hope in God, and does not set conditions for God; he offers his good deeds to God with sincerity and hopes for acceptance, forgiveness, and mercy, and all of this is from God's grace.

(1) Narrated by Ahmad, Al-Bukhari, Muslim, and Al-Bayhaqi.

The True Lord *the Most High* then mentions another question:

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ قُلْ فِيهِمَا إِثْمٌ كَبِيرٌ وَمَنْفَعَةٌ
لِّلنَّاسِ وَإِثْمُهُمَا أَكْبَرُ مِنْ نَّفْعِهِمَا وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ مَاذَا يُنْفِقُونَ قُلِ
الْعَفْوُ كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ الْآيَاتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢١٩﴾

**They ask you [Prophet] about intoxicants and gambling:
say, ‘There is great sin in both, and some benefit for people:
the sin is greater than the benefit.’ They ask you what they
should give: say, ‘Give what you can spare.’ In this way,
God makes His messages clear to you, so that you may
reflect [219] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 219)**

As we know, the Arabic word *khamr* (‘wine’) is derived from a word meaning ‘cover’, so, if a person enters a *khamra* it means he enters into the cover of tangled trees to hide there. The word *khimar* means the scarf a Muslim woman wears to cover her head, and this word, too, is taken from the same root. The verb *khamara* means to mix; all of these meanings are derived from the action of covering. The word *maysir* (‘gambling’) is derived from the word *yusr*, meaning ‘ease’, because it allows people to make easy money without much effort.

Intoxicants and gambling were things which were well known during the time of pagan ignorance before the coming of Islam. When Islam came to confront the establishments of this ignorance, it confronted the doctrine of the age without any clemency; it did not oppose it and confront it with gradual phases, but rather, it did away with it from the very outset, and the banner of ‘there is no God but God *the Most High* and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of God’ was raised. After this, Islam came to those things which were considered customs and began to minimise them; since people were accustomed to them, Islam took them with a certain amount of gentleness and clemency. This was an aspect of the wisdom of the Sacred Law in that it did not initially make the laws a matter of compulsion, for this could have created disturbances in society and in all existence. Rather, it took things with lenience.

Since the word for 'wine' (*khamr*) is derived from the word meaning 'to cover', what does it cover? It covers reason, which is shown by the fact that the one who imbibes it loses his reason. God *the Most High* does not want man, whom He honoured with intelligence, to go to the thing with which He honoured him, and with which his vicegerency on earth is directed, and cover it and cause it to be absent; for it is as though the one who does this, returns to God the blessing which He gave to him, and this is foolish.

Moreover, those who take intoxicants justify their action by saying that they want to forget the troubles of this worldly life. We say to them: Does forgetting about troubles stop them from coming? No; and so Islam asks you to live with your troubles to face them with your whole intellect; and if there are troubles and problems, Islam does not want you to forget them. No; rather, you must use your intelligence to face them. As long as you are required to face your problems with your intelligence, do not come to the centre of management of life's matters, the reason, which helps you to face your problems, and overrule it and prevent it from working.

Does escaping and forgetting difficulties prevent them? The thing which prevents difficulties is that you try with your entire mind to find a way out of them. If this is not within your capabilities, it is foolish to think of it; for God wants you to relieve your reason from these kinds of things. If the problem can be solved, and you are able to solve it, you need your intelligence with all of its power.

The True Lord *the Most High* guides us in this matter with the wisdom of the All-Wise, and gives us that by which we ourselves can judge the matter before it is required from us. He *the Exalted* reminds us of His blessings when He says that He grants us nourishment from the fruit of date-palms and vines; from it we derive intoxicants as well as wholesome sustenance (*an-Nahl*: 67).

When God *the Most High* mentions 'intoxicants', He passes over it without any comment, whilst when He says 'sustenance' He describes it as 'wholesome'. We should have been aware that God *the Most High* was laying the ground for the Islamic position on intoxicants. He did not describe the 'intoxicants' with any adjective, whilst He called the sustenance 'wholesome'. When people derived intoxicants from these fruits, they changed it from being wholesome sustenance,

since there is a difference between eating grapes as a meal and fermenting them and corrupting them and making from them a cover for the reason.

This being said, there is a difference between legislation and advice. When you advise someone, you say to him, 'I will show you the way to goodness, and you are free to follow it or not.' But when you legislate and make a ruling, you command this or that person to do that thing alone and nothing else.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'They ask you about wine and gambling....' He mentioned for us the evils of them, and left us to judge them. He *the Exalted* said, addressing His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, '...say, "In both is great evil and some benefit for people"....' Had He not said 'some benefit for people', they would have objected and said, 'We take benefit from wine, and we earn money from it, and we forget our troubles with it.' These were benefits as far as they were concerned, but the True Lord *the Most High* clarifies that their evil is greater than their benefit, that is, the advantage of consuming them is less than the harm they cause. This is a just appraisal, for the matter had not yet become a matter of prohibition since it was still a matter of advice and guidance.

God's words '...But their evil is greater than their benefit....' make them into a kind of sin. The gradual introduction of the ruling was required because He *the Exalted* was dealing with something which was a widespread custom, so, He *the Exalted* was laying the ground to bring an end to this custom. A custom is something which leads to habituation so that if time passes without you having what you are accustomed to have, there will be disturbance in your psyche and your blood. As long as something leads to habituation, it is better to close the door from the beginning and prevent this habit.

The beginning of the ruling on intoxicants came when one of the Muslims drank some wine before it had been prohibited, and then he went to pray and erroneously recited a Quranic verse saying, 'O you who disbelieve, I worship that which you worship,' whereupon came the reproach from the True Lord *the Most High* interdicting prayer, while in a state of drunkenness (*an-Nisa*: 43).

This was a way of getting those who were used to intoxicants to withdraw from them since the ruling was given to the one who prays not to attempt to pray whilst drunk; so, when will he have to abstain from it? When he wakes

up in the morning, he cannot approach intoxicants until he prays the dawn prayer, and then the Noon Prayer is close so, he must prepare for it, and then after this, comes the mid-afternoon prayer, and then, the sunset and evening prayers. That is, he will have no time to drink in those times in which he is due to pray, so, his only chance will be late at night, so, when night comes, he will drink a glass and then, will fall asleep. The time in which he abstains from intoxicants, will be longer than the time in which he takes them.

Once their habit of taking intoxicants began to diminish, some problems and arguments arose which drove them to ask the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to clarify for them a final ruling about intoxicants, whereupon God's words were revealed explaining to the believers that intoxicants, gambling, idolatrous practices and the divining of the future are but a loathsome evil of Satan's doing, and enjoining them to shun them in order to attain success. By means of intoxicants and gambling, Satan seeks only to sow enmity and hatred among the believers, and to turn them away from the remembrance of God and from prayer. The verse is concluded by exhorting the believers to desist (*al-Ma'ida*: 90-91).

Upon this, they said, 'We desist, o Lord!' So, by prohibiting intoxicants, the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to protect man's reason, for reason is the anchor of man's moral responsibility, and it is the crux of selection between alternatives, so, the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to protect this blessing for man.

The primary purpose of religion is to safeguard the five essentials which man cannot do without: to safeguard life, dignity, possessions, reason and religion. All laws revolve around the preservation of these five essentials; and if you consider these essentials, you will find that the protection of them all begins with the protection of the reason; for when reason is safe, it makes one think of religion, makes him think of work, and makes him cautious to preserve his dignity.

So reason is the basis of the responsible action which this matter revolves around, and the True Lord *the Most High* does not want man to obscure his reason with any kind of intoxicant so that there is no threat to these five essentials.

In the verse which we are currently examining, God referred to both intoxicants and gambling, for He *the Exalted* wants to guard man from moments of heedlessness. Gambling in its simplest form is for two people to sit before

one another, each one eager to get what is in the pocket of the other. What kind of brotherhood will remain between these two? Each of them wants to send the other home with empty pockets, so, what kind of brotherhood will there be between them?

It is strange that you see those who gamble with one another seem to be friends, each one of them eager to meet the other: what treacherous friendship this is! And it is strange that each of them is content with what the other one does: taking his money and remaining his friend; and what is strangest of all is the cheating and stealing that goes on between those who habitually gamble. If you looked at the lives of those who gamble, you would find that they spend and squander money without any caution, and they never benefit from the money that comes into their hands, no matter how much it is. Why? It is because when money is earned through gambling, it is spent without any caution. This is the state of the one who wins; as for the one who loses, you find him living in woe and pain for what he has lost, and you find that he is always poor, and perhaps he is forced to sacrifice his dignity and honour, if not to sell his own clothes and the dearest things he owns. This all happens because of fallacious dreams and false hopes which Satan makes alluring to both sides, winner and loser: the winner hopes to increase the money he has more and more, and the loser hopes to regain what he has lost, and then win.

When a person becomes habituated to earning without working, everything loses its value to him, and he gets used to living on cheap and easy earnings; and when he can find no gullible person to play with, he might steal or pilfer. This is the state of those who gamble; they are blight on society, for they are the ones who bribe, steal, and act boisterously, and they have no manners, and no friends or companions, and their houses are wrecks, and their families are fragmented, and they are wretched even in their form and appearance.

This is why the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘They ask you about wine and gambling; say, “In both is great evil and some benefit for people. But their evil is greater than their benefit.”’ As long as the evil is greater than the benefit, the side of evil is dominant. This is concerning the nature of the action itself; then as for the time of the action, He *the Exalted* commanded the believers to avoid praying while drunk (*an-Nisa*: 43).

And after this, He *the Exalted* gave the final ruling by prohibiting intoxicants and gambling along with other blameworthy practices in explaining to the believers that intoxicants, gambling, idolatrous practices, and the divining of the future are but a loathsome evil of Satan's doing and commanding them to shun those practices in order to attain success (*al-Ma'ida*: 90-91).

Then the verse moves on to another issue: '...And they ask you what they should spend; say, "The excess (beyond needs)."' This is the very question which 'Amr ibn Al-Jamuh asked, and the answer given before was: 'Say, "Whatever you spend of good is [to be] for parents and relatives and orphans and the needy and the wayfarer"' (*al-Baqara*: 215). Here the answer takes a different form: '...say, "The excess (beyond needs)."' The word '*afw*' literally means 'excess/increase', and we find the word used in another verse where the True Lord *the Most High* tells us about past nations to whom He had sent prophets and tried them with misfortune and hardship so that they might humble themselves and pray to God; then, He transformed the affliction into ease of life so that they '*afaw*' ('grew in number, increased, prospered') and said that misfortune and hardship befell their fathers. Then God took them to task, all of a sudden, without their being aware (*al-A'raf*: 94-95).

God Almighty is giving a warning and a caution so people take heed and reflect. He *the Exalted* did not send a prophet to any people whom they met with disbelief and denial save that He took them and tried them with poverty, misfortune, illness and hardship so that they would repent to their Lord and humble themselves before Him so that He would lift from them that with which He tried them. And then, when they did not return and abandon their disbelief and obstinacy, He tested them and tried them with prosperity, with verdure, wealth, health and ease, until they thrived and their wealth and possessions increased, and in the midst of these blessings they said, 'All of the fortune, misfortune, good and evil which comes to us is nothing, but the way of the universe, and the custom of time, and our ancestors and forefathers were met by the same as that with which we are met.' And when they insisted upon their disbelief, God *the Most High* sent His torment upon them all of a sudden, and sent down upon them a sudden punishment. God *the Most High* took them from hardship to ease, and treated them with good and ill fortune

so that they would have no argument to make against God; and when the baseness of their natures emerged, and they adhered to their falsehood, God took them to task as only the Almighty Determiner can. Let us reflect on what God says about this. He *the Exalted* tells His Prophet that He had indeed sent messages to people before his time, and seized them with misfortune and hardship so that they might humble themselves; yet, when the misfortune decreed by God befell them, they did not humble themselves, but rather, their hearts grew hard, for Satan had made all their doings seem fair to them. Then, when they had forgotten all that they had been told to take to heart, God threw open to them the gates of all good things, until – even as they were rejoicing in what they had been granted – God suddenly took them to task: and they were broken in spirit (*al-An‘am*: 42-44).

That is, We did not bring forth their punishment immediately, but rather, We left them so that they continued in their disobedience, until when they rejoiced in the favours, riches and increase in numbers they had been given, He suddenly took them to task, and they were broken in spirit (*al-An‘am*: 44), that is, despairing of God’s mercy, or regretful and woeful, yet, regret could not avail them at that time, for the opportunity had passed, and they had squandered it.

The True Lord *the Most High* sends down this torment as a punishment, and it makes the transformation all the more difficult. They persisted, so, the True Lord *the Most High* punished them with a mighty punishment, just like one who lifts somebody into the sky and then, lets him fall to the earth. The word ‘*afaw*’ (‘prospered’) here might also mean that they increased in wickedness. Another meaning of the word ‘*afw*’, can also be ‘to leave’ as we see in another verse where God, in the case of legal retribution for murder, says that whoever *is* ‘*ufiya*’ (‘left, given remission’) from his brother anything, then, there should be a suitable follow-up (*al-Baqara*: 178).

That is, if someone is left something by his brother let him take it. So ‘*afw*’ can sometimes mean ‘excess’, and sometimes ‘to leave’. Here, in the verse under consideration, the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...And they ask you what they should spend; say, “The excess (beyond needs).”’ That is, spending should only be from that which one owns in excess of one’s needs, so, the

word 'afw here means 'excess' or 'left aside'. And so we see here that 'afw is the same in both instances; Do not think that the different meanings are contradictory because together they lead to the intended meaning in the end. 'Af'w means 'excess' and it can also mean 'forgiveness.' So, spending from one's excess wealth leads to forgiveness, and also to comfort in the society. If someone farms lands and produces that which he needs to support himself and his dependants and more besides, will he leave that which is in excess to his needs to go rotten, or will he spend it on his needy relative or neighbour? Which option is closer to reason and logic? This was before the True Lord *the Most High* had legislated the *zakat* ('poor-due') in its conventional form; and what was the secret behind its having been changed from voluntary charity to obligatory poor-due?

It was because the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to give value to people's work, and make their work a means of ease for them, not a burden; for others benefit from a person's work, whether he intends it or not. This is why we find that there is a 'poor-due on precious minerals', which is the poor-due which must be paid on the treasures extracted from underground such as precious metals, oil, and so on; the True Lord made the proportion of this poor-due 20%, that is, one fifth, whilst the one who ploughs the earth and plants seeds in it and then, leaves them until rain falls on them and they grow, must pay poor-due of one tenth for what his farming produces.

As for the one who farms by irrigation, he only has to pay one twentieth; and for the one who trades every day and works hard, going to the producer and buying his wares and then supplying them to the customer who buys them, we tell him that he must pay only two-and-a-half per cent (2.5%).

So, the poor-due is in accordance with one's work and effort, as though the True Lord *the Most High* protects man's work from the foolishness of man-made legislation. God *the Most High* encourages the strong worker to increase his work so that society benefits; and God has granted the judge who follows the way of Islam to take from the rich that which will protect the dignity of the poor if the rich are stingy with the favours God has given them and refuse to spend God's provision on the poor. The way of truth protects wealth from the

corruption of greed, and the corruption of laziness, and it wants life to be upright and secure for the people.

The one who spends his wealth on his family, lives in security; and if one spends on his family and dependants, the circle of security increases. In this way, by the poor-due, God *the Most High* protects human aspirations from the foolishness of man-made legislations; for the human lawmaker comes to the one who works more, and increases his due taxes. We say to him: This worker does not intend to benefit society, yet, society will benefit from his work: a person might possess wealth, so, God *the Most High* places the notion in his mind: ‘What if you build an apartment building with ten storeys, and each storey containing four apartments?’ He calculates how much these apartments will make for him every month. This man is thinking of nothing but profit; so, let us leave him think of profit; we will find that society will benefit from this act when we consider how many people will work on the construction of this new building, starting from the builders and then moving on to the carpenters, blacksmiths, whitewashers, plumbers, and so on.

All of the poor sectors of society have benefitted and profited from this man’s wealth before a single penny has entered his pocket. God *the Most High* put the thought in his head, so, he took everything from his pocket and placed it in the pockets of the others before he even had an apartment building. In this way, God *the Most High* protects the work of the worker because his work will benefit others whether he intends this or not.

But if we say to him, ‘We will take your excess wealth forcibly,’ he will inevitably say to himself, ‘I will only work as much as I need, and only a little more.’ The True Lord *the Most High* does not want this way of thinking to be prevalent amongst people; He wants them to work in life in a way that is earnest and lawful; and the more they work, the less their obligatory poor-due will be because it is not only the worker who benefits from his work, but rather, society as a whole benefits; one person is idle, another farms, and a third works; and it is better for a person to eat from the work of his own hands than to eat from the charity and poor-due of others.

Al-Miqdam ibn Ma’d Yakrib *God be pleased with him* narrates that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘No one ever ate any

food better than that which he ate from the labour of his own hand; and God's Prophet David *peace be upon him* used to eat from the work of his hand.⁽¹⁾

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْيَتَامَىٰ قُلْ إِصْلَاحٌ لَّهُمْ خَيْرٌ وَإِنْ تُخَالِطُوهُمْ فَإِخْوَانُكُمْ ۚ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ الْمُفْسِدَ مِنَ الْمُصْلِحِ وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَأَغْنَيْنَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٢٢٠﴾

on this world and the next. They ask you about [the property of] orphans: say, 'It is good to set things right for them. If you combine their affairs with yours, remember they are your brothers and sisters: God knows those who spoil things and those who improve them. Had He so willed, He could have made you vulnerable too: He is almighty and wise' [220]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 220)

The True Lord *the Most High* begins this verse by saying: 'On this world and the Hereafter....' It is as though He is saying to us: Beware of thinking that every moral responsibility which comes from God will be rewarded in the Hereafter only; never – the reward will come to you in this world as well.

Reflect on the lives of those who adhered to the way of their religion and the moral way in their lives, and you will find that they took their reward in this world as contentment, happiness, and security so that you might find people wondering, 'How could so-and-so have raised his children, and how could he have taught them, when his means were so modest?'

They do not know that God's Hand is with him in the form of blessings in every action of his life. Do not think that this reward is restricted to the Hereafter alone, but rather, God will bring the reward forward to this world; and as for the Hereafter, it will be an increase, and we will enjoy the delights of the Hereafter by the grace of God. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'None of you shall enter paradise by his acts.' The companions

(1) Narrated by Ahmad and Al-Bukhari

asked, 'Not even you, O Messenger of God?' He said, 'Not even me, unless God enfolds me in His mercy.'⁽¹⁾

I would like us all to reflect on the state of those people who are upright in their way of life, and see how they live, and how they spend on their children, and reflect on the gladness and contentment which they enjoy, and how their lives are free of problems and psychological complications.

It is as though He *the Exalted* is alerting us to the fact that everything in the Straight Way only came to organise our lives for us and to take us away from the soul's whims.

We say that after the True Lord *the Most High* concluded speaking about the pilgrimage, the fifth Pillar of Islam, He showed us two categories of people in society: The first is the hypocrites whose speech does not reflect the truth of their hearts and souls: 'And from among the people is one whose speech concerning worldly life pleases you, and he calls God to witness as to what is in his heart, yet he is the fiercest of opponents. And when he turns away, he strives throughout the land to cause corruption therein and destroy tilth and progeny. And God does not like corruption' (*al-Baqara*: 204-205). If only when this sector was alerted to this, they turned back and repented; but no; when they are told by someone who advises them out of love and concern to fear God, they are filled with false pride because of their sin!

The other sector of society are those who would willingly sell their own selves to please God, which is represented either by their giving up their lives when fighting and so being martyred, or by their keeping their lives in order to do good in accordance with the way of God. He *the Exalted* said, 'And from among the people is he who sells himself, seeking means to please God, and God is kind to His servants' (*al-Baqara*: 207).

Then God *the Most High* spoke about entering wholly into Islam (submission to God), since entering into Islam, requires us all to enter into every kind of peace in life: peace with yourself so that your faculties are not in disarray and

(1) Narrated by Imam Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Imam Ahmad in his Musnad, Al-Baihaqi, and others in different versions

you do not say anything that contradicts your heart; peace with the society in which you live; peace with the universe which serves you as minerals, plants, and animals; and peace with the community in which you live. He *the Exalted* said, 'O you who have believed, enter into Islam completely and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy' (*al-Baqara*: 208).

All of this indicates to us that when the True Lord *the Most High* created mankind, He gave them the way of guidance which would secure peace and security for them in every aspect of this life; therefore, if you see a fissure or disturbance in the universe, or you see any fear or worry, know that one of the ways of Islam has been neglected. When the True Lord *the Most High* commands us to enter wholly into Islam, He *the Exalted* is forewarning us that if we stumble from His way of guidance, God is Almighty and All-Wise and cannot be overwhelmed by anyone, and no one can overpower Him, for He is the fully Capable and Powerful according to whose wisdom everything proceeds; so, do not think that you are doing God ill by dropping from His Way, for you are only doing ill to yourselves and your fellow men; for God cannot be overwhelmed.

The True Lord *the Most High* also alerts us to something else: He draws our attention to the fact that we do not know when the Hour (Doomsday) will come; for the Hour will come suddenly and unexpectedly, a calamitous cry and a tremulous earthquake. Take care, then, that this calamity does not come to you whilst you are heedless of it. This is all so that we also enter the Last Day in peace; it is as though the True Lord *the Most High* is alerting us to the fact that the words of the Quran are not mere theoretical words, but rather, they are words of the All-Wise and Knowing, which governed the history of the communities that came before the message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The True Lord *the Most High* sent many signs to the children of Israel, and they tarried, and did what they did; and they themselves suffered, and society suffered on their account; so, this discourse is not theoretical. And God wants us to look at the affairs of life, and not to look at the superficial surface of things; we must not let the allures of the life of this world deceive us about the life of the Hereafter, for the life of this world is short. We must measure the

life of this world by how long we live in it; and we only live in it for a short while, for some of us die old, whilst others die young.

And the True Lord *the Most High* tells us that He did not neglectfully leave His creatures, but rather, He sent to them messengers to show them God's Way. The people were one community united in truth until the whims of their souls were agitated, yet, God had mercy on them and did not leave them to their whims, but rather, the succession of messengers continued for mankind; and every time whims reigned and corruption spread, the True Lord *the Most High*, in His mercy, sent a messenger to alert the people, until the Final Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* came, whom God *the Most High* distinguished by making his way of guidance eternal, and placing its values in his community. And the Muhammadan community became the bearer of the duty of guarding God's way by which life on earth is made sound; for the True Lord *the Most High* trusted no other community to do this, this is why the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was the Seal of the Prophets.

Then after this, God *the Most High* alerted us to the fact that for a person to end up in the delights of paradise, does not come easily and lightly, but rather is a road surrounded by adversities; and therefore you must be cautious, and train your selves, and make them content with bearing these adversities, and accustom them to bearing these hardships, as the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Paradise is surrounded by adversities, and Hell is surrounded by lusts.'⁽¹⁾

The True Lord *the Most High* then mentions His blessing to His creatures in how He gave to man, His vicegerent on earth, reason to think with, and power to carry out the directives of the reason, and a material universe before him which responds to his actions. The reason plans, and the power carries out these plans in the material which was created and subdued by God. So all the tools of action belong to God, and you, o man, do not have the ability to create any part of it, other than to direct created powers to act in created substances; you do not bring anything into existence.

(1) Narrated by Ahmad, Muslim and At-Tirmidhi on the authority of Anas God be pleased with him

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* asks you, O Muslim, to preserve life's motions by allotting a part of your work's fruits to those who are unable to work; therefore, you must do enough work to suffice yourself, those you support, and those who cannot work themselves. In this way, God looks after those who cannot work by means of the works of those of their believing brothers who can work; and He *the Exalted* assures you that if you do this, and you look after those who cannot work, He *the Most High* will look after you when you yourself cannot work.

God *the Most High* has made life's conditions alternate through people so that there are not some people who are always able and others who are always incapacitated; rather, the True Lord *the Most High* makes those who were able yesterday incapacitated today, and makes those who were incapacitated yesterday able today so that work spreads evenly throughout existence, and so that we all know that God asks from you when you are able in order to give to you when you are incapacitated. This is why He asks us to spend on others, and the occasion for spending on others only arises after one has met the necessities of one's life. It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* is telling you that you must work enough in life to suffice yourself and allow you to spend on your dependants; if not, and if you only work enough for yourself, you might not find anything to spend.

After this, He *the Most High* tells us that every believer is charged with fulfilling the responsibility of spending on his near circle so that, everyone will be responsible for a part of society which is connected to him by blood, such as parents and near kin, and that we make the support of weak orphans a collective responsibility of the whole society, required of all; whether we have a family tie to them or not, they are all our family because God has made us responsible for taking care of them.

But can the way of God become settled without anyone ever transgressing it? No; which is why the True Lord *the Most High* alerts us to the fact that we will find people who are not happy to implement the way of God in life because they only live by wronging others; these people will be aggrieved by seeing the way of God implemented. So you should be aware of these people, which is why the True Lord *the Most High* ordained fighting so we can safeguard the

earth from the mischief of disbelief; for disbelief asserts the existence of multiple gods so that each person follows whims and his 'god' becomes his whim, and there will be as many gods as there are caprices. This is why God *the Most High* ordained fighting for the believers and told them 'even though it is hateful to you.' All of this secures for us the goal we seek, which is to enter wholly into security, peace and Islam. After this, He asks us to struggle with wealth and our lives, and to leave our homes and families if the course of the faith requires this, saying, 'Indeed, those who have believed and those who have emigrated and struggled in the Way of God - those hope for the mercy of God. And God is Forgiving and Merciful' (*al-Baqara*: 218).

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* draws our attention to the essential instrument of planning in the human being in order that he protects it and keeps it a sound instrument which is able to plan with clarity, wisdom and strength, namely reason; and He alerts us to how essential it is that we keep it from anything that intoxicates it, i.e. that veils it from working. Why do we keep it from intoxicants? So that it will remain, as God intends, a tool for selecting between alternatives.

Since reason is the thing that plans how the power that exists in man is to act on the material that exists in the universe, this planning reason must be left in a sound state, and man must not try to veil it; and no one should say, 'I veil it from the excessive increase of problems,' because problems do not require a single mind from you, but rather, they require two: so, do not take the only one you have and cover it with intoxicants, for the confrontation of problems requires you to plan robustly.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* warns us not to usurp the work of others without any work or effort on our part, warns us against gambling, which is a means to easy earnings. The warning against gambling only came to ensure that everyone works in life with honourable work which is untainted by deception. And it is as though all that we have just said was inspired by God's words 'On this world and the Hereafter....' And after this, the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...And they ask you about orphans. Say, "Improvement for them is best. And if you mix your affairs with theirs - they are your brothers. And God knows the corrupter from the amender. And if God had willed, He could have put you in difficulty. Indeed, God is Mighty and Wise."'

We know that orphans might not necessarily be needy people, but God *the Most High* is drawing our attention to the fact that the case of orphans is not a matter of need for sustenance, but rather, the orphan is in need of our replacing, by our faithful solidarity, that which he lost when he lost his father, and this will stop him from becoming resentful of children whose fathers are still alive. When the orphan finds that all the believers are his fathers, he will feel the solidarity that replaces for him paternal love, and he will not suffer from pangs of grief when he looks at his fellows who are distinct from him in that their fathers are still alive; and in this way, he will be free of resentment.

Muslims in the past used to mix their wealth with the wealth of orphans in order to make it easier for themselves and to lessen the burden of the work needed to support the orphans. If an orphan entered into the care of someone, and this person wanted to give the young orphan an independent life and an independent sphere of movement and an independent way of life, this would prove difficult to manage for the man; and for this reason God *the Most High* gave permission for the guardian to mix his wealth with the wealth of the orphan, and to make the management of this wealth part of the management of his own wealth so that the guardian would not have any hardship. When the words of God *the Most High* were revealed that forbade the believers to approach the money of an orphan except to improve it until he comes of age (*al-An'am*: 152), people in the Muslim community were disturbed, and wondered how they should deal with orphans since the True Lord *the Most High* had said that those who sinfully consume the possessions of orphans fill their bellies with fire (*an-Nisa'*: 10). So people kept their hands off the wealth of orphans, and the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to make the matter easier, and so revealed His words: '...Say, "Improvement for them is best. And if you mix your affairs with theirs - they are your brothers....' This mixing must be on the basis that orphans are your brethren; and be very careful that there is nothing in this mixing which is not in the interest of the orphan.

And beware of understanding that social convention allows the guardian to supervise the orphan's wealth without keeping any accounts, for God *the Most High* distinguishes between him who spoils things and him who improves. No one should try and say to the people that he has opened his door to the orphan, and

that he has taken care of the orphan, when in reality this is not the case; for God *the Most High* distinguishes between the corrupter and the amender.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...And if God had willed, He could have put you in difficulty....’ To put someone in difficulty means to take someone and put him in an adverse situation. Had God not allowed you to share your wealth, you would have been afflicted with hardship; so, God made it easier for the believers by allowing guardians to mix their wealth with the wealth of the orphans in their care. The meaning of ‘mixing’ is that the guardian unites the work of the orphan with his own work, and unites the living of the orphan with his own living, instead of the orphan having, for example, his own separate cutlery, which is what would happen.

In those days leftover food would be spoilt, since there was no way of keeping and preserving food like refrigerators; and this was a source of harm both for the orphan and for the one looking after him. But when God *the Most High* said, ‘...And if you mix your affairs with theirs...’ this relieved the guardians of this hardship, since to share one’s life means to live with them in a way which engenders no differentiation.

When we were children, we had in school a lesson called ‘mixing and blending’. To *mix (khalt)* is to combine, for example, to mix the seeds of beans with lentils, or grains of rice with hazelnuts. If you want to tell one kind from the other, you are able to do so, and you can separate one kind from the other with a sieve; so, mixing takes place between seeds and the like.

As for blending (*mazj*), this takes place with liquids. The True Lord *the Most High* guides us to share or mix (*khalat*) with orphans, not to blend their wealth with our wealth; for the orphan will reach adulthood one day, whereupon the guardian will have to separate his wealth from the wealth of the orphan.

The True Lord *the Most High* continues: ‘...And God knows the corrupter from the amender...’ because the guardian might claim to the people that he is looking after the rights of the orphan and that he is improving his condition and respecting his wealth, whilst his intention might be contrary to this; yet, He *the Exalted* did not leave the matter to the superficial understanding of society of the conduct of the guardian with the orphan and the mixing of his

life, but rather, He ascribed all this to the supervision of God above all other supervision; and this is so a person can be cautious and aware that the protection of God is above all other protection. Had the True Lord *the Most High* willed it, He could have imposed hardships upon the guardians and made them work for the orphan alone, and separate the life of the orphan from their lives and their living conditions, and this would have caused severe hardship for the soul. In order for us to understand the exact meaning of hardship and suffering (*'anat*), let us consider the words of the True Lord *the Most High* when He tells the believers that there has come to them a Messenger from among themselves: heavily weighs upon him the thought that they might suffer; full of concern for them and full of compassion and mercy towards the believers (*at-Tawba*: 128).

To you has come, o believers, a Messenger from amongst you, an Arab from Quraysh to deliver to you the Message of God *the Most High*, full of concern for you lest you fall into hardship, or live in the wretchedness of disbelief, and concerned that you be of those who are rightly guided. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* did not come from the kind of angels, but rather from the kind of humans; and no person can say, 'He is not an appropriate role-model for me.' He grew up in Mecca, where Quraysh lived, and his history was well-known to his people, which are borne out by the fact that they testified to his possessing the first of the necessary attributes of message-bearing, which is trustworthiness. The True Lord *the Most High* brought him forth from amongst mankind, and he was not a stranger to them; and simply by his telling of the Revelation, there were some who believed in him before he recited the Quran, and before he issued any challenge to them.

When the angel Gabriel *peace be upon him* came to him in the cave of Hira' and said to him, 'Read,' he said, 'I am not a reader,' So, he took hold of me and whelmed me in his embrace until he had reached the limit of my endurance (that is, he hugged him and squeezed him; and the wisdom of this was to keep him from any distraction so his heart was alert), and then, let me go and said, 'Read.' I said, 'I am not a reader,' so, he took hold of me and whelmed me in his embrace a second time until he had reached the limit of my endurance, and then, let me go and said, 'Read.' I said, 'I am not a reader,' so, he took hold of

me and whelmed me in his embrace a third time, and then, let me go and said, ‘Read in the name of your Lord Who has created – created man from a clot. Read – for your Lord is the Most Bountiful Who has taught the use of the pen, taught man that which he knew not’ (*al-‘Alaq*: 1-5). The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* went back home with a trembling heart to his wife Khadija bint Khuwaylid *God be pleased with her* and said to her, ‘Cover me, cover me.’ She covered him until the alarm left him, and then he told Khadija what had happened, saying, ‘I feared for myself;’ but Khadija *God be pleased with her*, with her sound reasoning, said, ‘No, by God; God would never degrade you, for you keep family ties, support the needy, provide for the destitute, you receive guests with hospitality, and you help those afflicted with disasters.’⁽¹⁾ Khadija *God be pleased with her* adduced that whoever possessed all these attributes was ready to receive the Message. The True Lord *the Most High* tells the believers that there has come to them a Messenger from among themselves who heavily weighs upon him the thought that they might suffer; full of concern for them and full of compassion and mercy towards the believers (*at-Tawba*: 128). That is, he loves you, and the same things cause him hardship and trouble him as cause you hardship and trouble you; this is why the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was so concerned for his community, and it is narrated that He *peace and blessings be upon him* used to repeat, ‘My people! My people! My people!’

And the True Lord *the Most High* knew that the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was concerned for his people. ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr ibn Al-‘As *God be pleased with him* related that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* once recited God’s words reporting the supplication of Abraham *peace be upon him* to his Lord that the idols have misguided many people and that he who follows him in faith is truly of him (*Ibrahim*: 36), and the supplication of Jesus *peace be upon him* asking God to spare his followers suffering and if He causes them to suffer, indeed, they are His servants; and if He forgives them, indeed, He alone is Almighty, truly Wise (*al-Ma’ida*: 118), and then, he raised his hands and said, ‘O God, my people, my people!’ And then, he wept. God *the Most High* said: ‘O Gabriel, go to Muhammad – and your Lord

(1) Narrated by *Al-Bukhari* in the chapter on the beginning of the Revelation

knows best – and ask him why he weeps.’ Gabriel *peace be upon him* went to him and asked him, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* told him what he had said – and God knew best – and then, God *the Most High* said, ‘O Gabriel, go to Muhammad and say: “We shall give you cause to be pleased with your people, and we shall not disappoint you.”’⁽¹⁾

When we reflect on the exactness of the Prophet’s answer, we realise that the Noble Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was concerned for his people; he saw himself as being the brother of every believer; but a man might change towards his brother, which is why the Noble Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* did not want the affair of the Muslims to be out of the Hand of God and His mercy – as He is the All-Generous Creator – to his own control *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* knows that God is more merciful with His creatures than anyone, even the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* himself. We are saying all this as we show the meaning of the hardship and suffering (‘*anat*’) which could afflict a person if he does not preserve the right of God connected to the wealth of the orphan, for God is Almighty and Wise, and He is the True Lord *the Most High* Who overwhelms and cannot be overwhelmed by anyone. We see in the words of the True Lord *the Most High* ‘...Indeed, God is Mighty and Wise’ that the attribute of might is tied to the attribute of wisdom.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* takes us on to a new issue which, if we consider it, we will find it to be the basis of any motion in life and in society, which is the issue of marriage. He *the Exalted* wants to secure stability and happiness for the being whom He honoured and made him His vicegerent on earth, and for whose service He subdued all other beings.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants this being to go forth from a single spring of guidance because it is conflicting caprices that corrupt the motions of life, so, He wanted all of humankind collectively to emerge from a single spring of faith, and He wanted to protect this spring from being affected by the multiplicity of inclinations and caprices, which is why the True Lord

(1) Narrated by Muslim

the Most High alerts us to this issue. He *the Exalted* wants to safeguard the soundness of the vessel which would produce man after marriage; since with marriage man reproduces and life continues through procreation. For this reason, there must be precision when choosing the spring from which one's progeny will come; so, He *the Exalted* says:

وَلَا تَنْكِحُوا الْمُشْرِكَةَ حَتَّىٰ تُؤْمِنَ ۚ وَلَأَمَةٌ مُّؤْمِنَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ مُّشْرِكَةٍ
وَلَوْ أَغَبَّكُمْ ۚ وَلَا تَنْكِحُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ حَتَّىٰ يُؤْمِنُوا ۚ وَلَعَبْدٌ مُّؤْمِنٌ خَيْرٌ
مِّنْ مُّشْرِكٍ وَلَوْ أَغَبَّكُمْ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى النَّارِ ۚ وَاللَّهُ يَدْعُو إِلَى
الْجَنَّةِ وَالْمَغْفِرَةِ بِإِذْنِهِ ۚ وَبَيِّنُ ۙ ءَايَاتِهِ ۚ لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢٢١﴾

**Do not marry idolatresses until they believe: a believing slave woman is certainly better than an idolatress, even though she may please you. And do not give your women in marriage to idolaters until they believe: a believing slave is certainly better than an idolater, even though he may please you. Such people call [you] to the Fire, while God calls [you] to the Garden and forgiveness by His leave. He makes His messages clear to people, so that they may bear them in mind [221]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 221)**

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘And do not marry idolatresses until they believe....’ This is the first brick in the building of the family and society, because if she is not a believer, what will happen? She will raise the new-born in a way which reflects her idolatry and your role as a father and educator will not come until after a long time has passed, by which time, these things will have been implanted in the child. So beware of a union between a believing man and an idolatrous woman because this will disrupt the organisation of the family; the actions of the mother with the child affect its first stages of development: they affect its values and its moral development, and this is something which begins as soon as he can see and perceive. The baby spends its first years in its mother's care, and after this it grows up and comes into its father's care. If the mother is an idolatress and the father is a believer, faith will not come to the child until idolatry has already taken hold of him and overcome him.

We know that human infancy is the longest infancy of any living being; there are some infancies which last only two hours, such as that of a fly, and other infancies which last a month; and the longest infancy is that of man because this it is appropriate for the mission which man will undertake. All of the infancies which came before it are infancies which have very easy missions, yet man is the one who must take his values from it, which is why his infancy is so long. It lasts until he reaches puberty, and in this respect, the True Lord *the Most High* teaches the believers that when the children among them reach puberty, they should ask permission to enter their parents' chambers like those before them have been enjoined to ask it. In this way God makes clear His messages: for God is All Knowing, Wise (*an-Nur*: 59).

It is as though an infant remains an infant until he reaches puberty, so, how many years does he remain an infant? And how many years will this infant drink from the springs of idolatry if his mother is an idolater? It is such a long time that he cannot be a believer after this without his faculties being disturbed. Even if such a person can become a believer, his belief will remain under the compulsion, pressure and authority of his father and this kind of faith will be something superficial, not settled, or grounded on a sincere basis.

We know that the fruits we enjoy eating only ripen after the seeds from which the new tree are made ripen, and before this, they are only unripe fruits with no taste. The True Lord *the Most High* wants to alert us to this fact in order that man take care to keep fruits until they ripen and have seeds.

A woman cannot be good fruit unless she produces a child who, like her, is righteous and beneficial. The True Lord *the Most High* wants the youth not to be confused about its faith, which is why He *the Exalted* says, 'And do not marry idolatresses until they believe.' That is, beware of being deceived by base, ignoble standards. You must all accept God's judgement that '...a believing slave woman is better than an idolatress, even though she might please you...' because if a person is pleased by a woman without considering her faith, this will be a short-lived pleasure.

If we collected all the moments of time in which a woman's physical beauty can be enjoyed, the total would not add up to more than a single month of all the years of marriage. Every week, there might be a meeting which lasts

only minutes, and then the beauty fades and the values remain deep-rooted in the soul; and we find that when a woman marries and is slow in becoming pregnant, she suffers from worry, as does her husband.

If the man marries her for her looks, her beauty, her figure, and her eyes, this will all cool off and fade away after a time, and then, there will be other standards for life to continue, and when the person looks for them, but does not find them, he will be consumed with regret because they were not in his mind when he made his choice.

Because of this, the woman tries to consolidate her position by having a child to tie the man to her, and so that society will say, 'You must put up with her for the children's sake!' After marriage, a man wants different standards from those physical standards which he first had. For this reason, God *the Most High* forewarns us, saying, 'And do not marry idolatresses until they believe...', and He stresses 'until they believe' because Islam expiates all that came before it as long as she attains faith, all the rest is forgotten.

Look at the precision of God's words: 'And do not marry idolatresses until they believe, and a believing slave woman is better than an idolatress....' That is, a Muslim slave is better than an idolatrous free woman '...even though she might please you....' God's words here refer to the standards of physical attraction in order to alert us to the fact that it is not right for us to ignore eternal standards and adopt standards which are ephemeral and transient.

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...And do not marry idolatrous men [to your women] until they believe....' This is a similar statement, not an inverse one since He did not tell believing women not to marry idolatrous men, but rather said, '...And do not marry idolatrous men [to your women] until they believe....' This is precise discourse because men have the authority to give women in marriage, and so He addresses them, saying: do not give in marriage, whilst women do not have the authority to give themselves in marriage. We know the legal principle which says, 'There can be no marriage without a guardian.' He did not address His words to women because a woman is governed by her emotions whilst her guardian will look at the matter from every other angle which influences the situation.

It is true that we ask for the virgin girl's assent to be sure that her feeling is not against the marriage, but the father or whichever male guardian it is will judge things according to various standards. If we leave the girl to judge according to her own standards, the marriage will collapse as soon as her emotions abate; and when she then applies rational standards, she might not find this marriage to have been right for her, so, the marriage fails. This is why Islam asks us to seek the woman's opinion so that we do not bring her someone she dislikes, but the one who actually gives her in marriage to this man is her guardian because he has rational, social and moral standards which the girl might not consider. She might be swept away by the suitor's fine appearance, handsomeness and smooth speech, but once we come to the matter of the motions of life and its endurance, she might find that he is not right for her.

In order that the matter combines the emotion of the girl, the reason of the father and the experience of the mother, the girl must be consulted, and the father must seek the opinion of the mother; and every marriage which takes place in this way, will have the opportunity to be blessed with success because all the standards will have been involved so that no standard is left out. The father bases his verdict on the agreement of the daughter; if the girl refuses – even if the standards of the father are all met, but the girl does not accept this man, the marriage should not take place.

Many marriages have failed because we did not find those who implemented God's way of entering matrimony; and then, when God's way of entering matrimony is not implemented, and they are met with failure, they cry out for the rulings of Islam to save them. We say to them: Did you enter the matrimony according to God's religion? Since you entered matrimony according to your own opinions, which were not in line with the way of God, then, solve the problem with your own opinions, too. The religion is only responsible for those who begin with its standards; but if you enter matrimony according to other than God's standards, and then, you want God, or those who adhere to God's command, to solve your problems for you, you thereby wrong yourself and those who adhere to God's command. If these problems did not occur, we would accuse the way of God, and we would say, 'Look, we have left the way of God, and yet lived happily!' Therefore it was necessary that such problems occur.

So, the words of the True Lord *the Most High* ‘And do not marry idolatresses until they believe....’ refer to a matter which had a specific cause, but their lesson lies in their general application, not their specific cause. The cause for the revelation of these words is that there was a Companion of the Prophet named Marthad ibn Abu Marthad Al-Ghanawi, who was sent by the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to Mecca to bring some Muslims out of it. He had been in love with a woman before Islam named ‘Inaq, and she also loved him, and when she saw him, she wanted to be alone with him, so, he said to her, ‘Woe to you, Islam has come between us!’ She replied, ‘Marry me,’ so, he said to her, ‘I shall marry you, but only after I seek the leave and permission of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.’ When he asked him, the words of God *the Most High* were revealed: ‘And do not marry idolatresses until they believe, and a believing slave woman is better than an idolatress, even though she might please you....’

It is also said that God’s words ‘...and a believing slave woman is better than an idolatress, even though she might please you...’ were revealed about Khansa’,⁽¹⁾ a black slave-girl of Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman to whom Hudhayfa said, ‘O Khansa’, you are remembered in the Highest Assembly despite your blackness and ugliness, and God has made mention of you in His Book,’ and he set her free and married her.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says, ‘...And do not marry idolatrous men [to your women] until they believe, and a believing slave is better than an idolater, even though he might please you....’ The standards are the same when it comes to choosing a life partner; it is the desire to build a family life on good foundations. The goal of anything is what determines its value, and it is not the means which determine something’s value; you might travel on a dangerous road, but its destination is good, or you might travel on a road carpeted with flowers and fragrant plants, but its destination is evil. For this reason, the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...Those invite to the Fire, but God invites to paradise and to pardon, by His permission. And He makes clear His verses to the people that they may remember.’ Those who invite to the fire are

(1) The name Khansa’ means a woman with a low-bridged nose with slightly wide sides (a pug-nose).

the people of idolatry; as for God, He invites people to paradise, and forgiveness comes by His permission, that is by His facilitation and His conferral of success. We all know the aphorism spoken by Imam 'Ali *God be pleased with him*: 'There is no good in a good which is followed by Hell, and there is no evil in an evil which is followed by paradise.'

God's words '...that they may remember' are repeated often; what does this remembering achieve? To remember something makes you feel that the matter was known to you, but heedlessness veiled it. If you become aware of your heedlessness, it reminds you of what you had forgotten before; but if the heedlessness stretches on and the principle is forgotten, this is the real disaster which consigns the matter to oblivion.

So remembering involves several stages: the first stage is that you come to know if you had not known, or you learn if you had been ignorant. The second stage is that you remember if you have forgotten, or you make an accord between what you know and what you do. Remembering tells you to make an accord between your knowledge and your behaviour so that you do not fall into ignorance; and ignorance means that you 'know' something which contradicts the truth. God wanted to safeguard the person who chose faith when He forbade him from marrying a woman of the people of idolatry.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to secure for the one whom He made His vicegerent on earth a single doctrine from which would issue human conduct; for if doctrines multiply according to caprices, then ways of conduct will also multiply according to caprices; and when ways of conduct are manifold, the motions of life conflict instead of converging.

So, the True Lord *the Most High* wants to secure the unity of doctrine which is immune to any outside influence; this is why He specified for the laying of the first brick of the family that a believer cannot marry an idolatress because in this situation the idolatress will undertake the raising of the child for a long period of time which, as we said, is the longest infancy of any living being. If the father is a believer and the mother is an idolater, the father will be busy with work so that many values which contradict sound faith will take root at the hand of the mother.

The True Lord *the Most High* also does not want the believing woman to marry an idolater because if she marries an idolater, she will go to live with him and his idolatrous environment and his family, and her child will grow up in an environment of idolatry so that values that contradict sound faith will take root in him. The True Lord *the Most High* wants by this protection, i.e. by believers not marrying idolaters of either sex, to protect the first stage of infancy; and when the first stage of infancy is protected, the first spring from which comes the doctrinal education of the infant, will be a united spring, and he will not swing to and fro between different doctrines. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘And do not marry idolatresses until they believe, and a believing slave woman is better than an idolatress, even though she might please you. And do not marry idolatrous men [to your women] until they believe, and a believing slave is better than an idolater, even though he might please you. Those invite to the fire, but God invites to paradise and to pardon, by His permission. And He makes clear His verses to the people that they may remember.’

All of this is in order that the True Lord *the Most High* can conserve the environment in which the new-born child grows up. We must understand that the True Lord *the Most High* gave male believers a dispensation to marry women of the people of the Book when He addressed the believers saying that all the good things of life have been made lawful to them. And the food of those who have been given revelation before is lawful to them, and their food is likewise lawful to them. And lawful in wedlock to them are women from among the believers and women from among those who have been given revelation before their time – provided that they give them their dowers, taking them in honest wedlock, not in fornication, nor as secret love-companions. But as for him who rejects belief – in vain will be all his works: for in the life to come, he shall be among the lost (*al-Ma’ida*: 5).

Scholars have taken two positions regarding the dispensation given by the True Lord *the Most High* to male believers allowing them to marry women from the people of the Book: the first position is that it is forbidden because some of the scholars are of the opinion that the people of the Book have deviated from their beliefs to the extent that they are in idolatry; for is there anything more

idolatrous than to ascribe divinity to a human being? The second position is that some scholars have allowed one to marry a woman from the people of the Book, and he must ask her whether she believes in the divinity of a human being, or she believes solely in God, the One, the All-Dominant. If it is only a matter of differing about the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, it is not so serious; yet, if she believes in the divinity of a human being alongside God, she has entered into idolatry, and the believer must be cautious.

If the man has authority and he can marry a woman of the people of the Book, he usually takes her into his environment so that the influencing environment will be one; and the fact that authority is the father's, alongside the family's presence in an environment of faith, will affect and lessen the influence of the mother from the people of the Book on her children. Yet, since one should be aware that there are ways which entice and draw one subtly towards idolatry, it is better for the believing man to avoid all this and seek to fortify and protect himself by marrying a Muslim woman.

When the True Lord *the Most High* protects the first stage of infancy, He wants the infant to avoid being instilled with division, discord and conflicting dispositions. When we make sure that a child lives and grows up in an affectionate environment, he will grow up as a balanced child, and Islam wants to preserve the balance of this child. Some people pose the question: 'Why don't we make communal nurseries for raising children?' It is as though, they want to solve the problem by this means.

We say to them: The problem was not solved by those who did this before us, which is why when we read their books such as Children Without Families, we find that their infancies were torturous. Why should we go so far? When we look into the way they raise children communally in Israel, scientific studies confirm that the children live in terrible misery to the extent that they suffer from widespread incontinence until they are young adults.

How can it escape our notice that until a child reaches the age of two or more, it does not want to share its mother with anyone; even if it has siblings, it is jealous of them? So what about a whole group of children who are raised by a woman who is not their mother? The affection of a hundred carers does not amount to the affection of a mother, for all the carers combined, do not

have the heart of the mother who bore the child. The affection which a mother gives is not superficial or professional affection, but it is a natural part of life which God created to give it in the right way. This is why the child must be given a period of time in which he thinks that the mother who bore him is for him alone, and no one can share her with him, even his own siblings. And when the time comes for him to leave the cradle and go out into the street to encounter the work of life, and he finds that those who work are men, and fathers of children like him, he loves after this to be ascribed to a father who has a clear role in the outer society.

One of the constituents of a child's development is that he feels he has a mother whom no one else shares with him, and that he has a father whom no one else shares with him; and if anyone shares them with him, they are his siblings, who are all included and covered by the affection of the mother and the care of the father. Those who know the science of child-rearing affirm that a child's need for its mother is an important and crucial need for child-rearing for the first two years and few months, and when the True Lord *the Most High* revealed to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* fourteen centuries ago these wise and true words, He showed this fact as plainly and clearly as can be. God addresses man in general saying that He has enjoined upon him goodness towards his parents: in pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give him birth; and her bearing him and his utter dependence on her took thirty months. And so when he attains to full maturity and reaches forty years, the righteous person prays to his Lord to enable him to be grateful for those blessings of God with which He has graced him and his parents, and that he may do what is right that will meet with God's acceptance, and grant him righteousness in his offspring. Indeed, to God he turns in repentance, and, assuredly, he is of those who have submitted themselves to God (*al-Ahqaf*: 15).

The mother is the child's natural carer, as the True Lord intended it. So the True Lord wants to protect the first brick of the formation of society, the family, in the doctrinal structure, from being influenced by idolatry; and He wants to preserve a sound structure for the family.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* deals with the issue of relations with a woman during menstruation; and legislation is given to regulate this matter since when Islam came there were two social attitudes in this regard:

One was to see a menstruating woman as suffering from contamination, which meant that her husband could not eat with her, or stay with her, or be intimate with her, or live with her in one house, and the same went for his sons. The other attitude was to see a menstruating woman as just an ordinary woman no different from a non-menstruating woman, that is, able to live her married life with her husband without any caution or reservations. The situation, then, was between one extreme and another, and Islam came to put a limit to this issue. The True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْمَحِيضِ ۖ قُلْ هُوَ أَذًى فَأَعْتَزِلُوا النِّسَاءَ فِي الْمَحِيضِ
وَلَا تَقْرُبُوهُنَّ حَتَّى يَطْهُرْنَ فَإِذَا تَطَهَّرْنَ فَأْتُوهُنَّ مِنْ حَيْثُ أَمَرَكُمُ اللَّهُ ۚ إِنَّ
اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِينَ وَيُحِبُّ الْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ

**They ask you [Prophet] about menstruation. Say,
'Menstruation is a painful condition, so keep away from
women during it. Do not approach them until they are
cleansed; when they are cleansed, you may approach them
as God has ordained. God loves those who turn to Him,
and He loves those who keep themselves clean [222]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 222)**

When you read, 'It is harm', you take the ruling from One Who is trusted to give rulings, and the matter is not up for discussion. No matter what kind of explanations, analyses and causes medicine gives, we say to it: No; the One Who created said 'It is harm.' The Arabic word for 'menstruation' (*mahid*) means blood, and can also mean the place of menstruation and the time of it.

The fact that God *the Most High* says that menstruation is harmful, prepares the mind to receive a ruling about this harm. In this way, the mind prepares for the gravity of the ruling; and the ruling conveyed a warning and a prohibition, after its justification had already been given.

The True Lord *the Most High* – Who is the Creator – wanted the process of menses for a woman to be a chemical process essential for her life and her fertility, and He commanded men to keep from women whilst they are menstruating because menstruation is harmful for them. But is the blood of

menses harmful for men, or women? It is harmful for both men and women because the verse affirms the harm to be general and did not specify who was meant by it. The thing which indicates this is that menses places impurities in a vulnerable place on a man, namely the place where he ejaculates, and if any microbes reach this place, they can infect him with dangerous illnesses.

What happens is that the True Lord *the Most High* created the woman's womb, and there are in her ovaries a number of egg cells known to Him *the Most High Alone*, and when one of these eggs detaches without having been fertilised, and the lining of the womb which is made of blood tissues has a low proportion of the hormones that strengthen the lining of the womb, and this proportion of hormones is low, menstruation occurs.

Menstruation is blood containing dead tissues, and the area of the vagina and uterus begins to be agitated because this area is very sensitive to the development of microbes which cause inflammations for the woman, as well as for the man if he has sexual intercourse with his wife during menstruation. Menstruation adversely affects the woman in her strength and her body, which is proved by the fact that God excuses her from fasting and praying. So it is tiring and exhausting for her, and so it is not permissible for a man to disturb her with anything more than she already has to deal with.

God's words 'it is harm' is general, meaning that the harm affects both the man and the woman. After this, the True Lord *the Most High* explains that the word 'harm' is a situation which requires a ruling to be given concerning it, either with a permission or a prohibition; as long as it is harmful, it will inevitably be a prohibition.

He *the Exalted* says, '...so keep away from wives during menstruation. And do not approach....' If someone says that mahid here means the place of menses, he bases this on the fact that the thing which is prohibited is sexual intercourse, but that which is above the navel or above the clothing is permissible to touch. This means that God's command '...keep away from wives...' means 'Do not go to them in the place where the harm, i.e. the menses, comes from, '...until they are pure. And when they have purified themselves, then, come to them from where God has ordained for you....' The verb 'they are pure' (*yat-hurna*) is derived from the noun *tuhur* meaning 'to be clean'; when we

reflect on God's words '...And when they have purified themselves...' we find that He did not say 'and when they are purified'. So what is the difference between 'to be purified' and 'to purify oneself'?

'They are purified' means that their menses has finished, whilst 'they have purified themselves' means they have performed the ritual bath after menstruation; this is why there emerged a difference of opinion between scholars as to whether simply by the menstrual course ending and the blood stopping it becomes permissible for a man to have intercourse with his wife, or whether it is obligatory to wait until the woman purifies herself by bathing.

In order to avoid this difference of opinion, we say that God's words 'they have purified themselves' mean 'they have performed the ritual bath,' so, intercourse cannot take place until they have bathed. One of the wonders of the expressions of the Quran is that the words affect how rulings are derived. An example of this is God's words describing the Quran: It is a truly Honoured Quran, in a well-guarded book which none but the pure shall touch (*al-Waqi'a*: 77-79).

What does this mean, then? Does it mean that none can touch the Quran save the angels whom God *the Most High* purified from all impurities, or does it mean that human beings also have the right to touch the written Quran since they purify themselves? Some scholars say that we must include this matter under the general theme of purification which means that 'but the pure' means those who have been purified by He Who ordained purification for them. Because of this, when Muslims perform the ritual bath (*ghusl*) or the ablution (*wudu*), two things have happened to him: self-purification, and purity.

Self-purification occurred with the ritual bath or with ablution whilst the purity was by God's law. Just as God *the Most High* purified the angels from the outset, He purified us humans by His law; in this way, we can understand the verse in its general sense so that the difference of opinion is removed. The words of the True Lord *the Most High* in the verse we are currently examining are: '...until they are pure...' that is, until God gives them leave by purifying them, and then, they obey God's law by purifying themselves. Then, God says, '...then come to them from where God has ordained for you...' that is, in those places which are lawful.

Then God says, ‘...Indeed, God loves those who are constantly repentant and loves those who purify themselves.’ The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to make you feel comfortable, so, just as He asked you to purify yourself physically, He *the Most High* also accepts for you to purify yourself spiritually by making repentance, which is why he mentioned both the physical and the spiritual aspects of the issue. After this, the True Lord *the Most High* brought a new ruling, which brought an end to a dubious notion which the Jews had raised.

The Jews used to spread the notion that if a man enters his wife from behind, even in her vagina, the child would be born cross-eyed. The vagina is the proper place for intercourse, so, what is meant here is not anal intercourse – God forbid – such as the people of Lot *peace be upon him* used to indulge in. Since this dubious notion which the Jews spread had no basis in fact, the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to refute it, so, He said:

نَسَاؤُكُمْ حَرْثٌ لَّكُمْ فَأَتُوا حَرْثَكُمْ أَنَّى شِئْتُمْ وَقَدِّمُوا لِأَنفُسِكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا
 اللَّهَ وَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّكُمْ مُّلَقَّوهُ وَبَشِّرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢٢٣﴾

**Your wives are your fields, so go into your fields whichever way you like, and send [something good] ahead for yourselves. Be mindful of God: remember that you will meet Him.’ [Prophet], give good news to the believers [223]
 (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 223)**

The True Lord *the Most High* opened the way for a man and wife to enjoy each other in any way, provided that penetration occurs in the place of impregnation. The True Lord *the Most High* used the word ‘tilth’ here to show that tilling takes place in the place of planting. God teaches the believers: ‘...come, then, to your tilth....’ What is tilth? Tilth is the place where plants grow; we find the word used in another verse where God *the Most High* speaks about the hypocrite who goes about striving to ‘...destroy tilth and progeny...’ (*al-Baqara*: 205).

So, come to your wives in the place of crops, the crop of children; as for the place where no child can grow, do not go near it. Some people incorrectly understand that God’s words ‘...come, then, to your tilth as you may desire...’ mean that a woman can be entered in any place; but this is a mistake because

His words 'Your wives are your tilth...' mean the place where crops are planted, and the crop of men and women is children, so, enter her in the place where a child can be made, from any direction you wish.

The True Lord *the Most High* continues: '...but first provide something good for your souls...' that is, be careful not to think that it is only a matter of sexual enjoyment; rather, the True Lord *the Most High* wants this sexual pleasure to protect the hardships that will come from this pleasure; for the offspring that come as a result of sexual intercourse will bring many hardships and responsibilities, and had God *the Most High* not linked them to this pleasure, people would have renounced sex.

This is why the True Lord *the Most High* links between the toil and effort of parents in raising their children with the pleasure of sexual desire to secure the continuation of the human race. Despite this, the True Lord *the Most High* warns us not to imagine that this sexual pleasure is the main purpose of sexual intercourse, and therefore says, '...but first provide something good for your souls...' that is, be well aware that this matter is not the end, but rather, the means, so, do not confuse the means with the end. '...But first provide something good for your souls...' that is, save for yourselves something which will benefit you in the days ahead.

So, the chief purpose of sexual relations is procreation; '...but first provide something good for your souls...' that is, do not take the passing momentary pleasure as though it is the goal, but rather take it for that which will come in the future. And how can we provide something for our own souls? Or, what should we do? It is in order that we do not suffer on account of the one who will come; and you should be well aware of this matter by providing something for your soul which will give you ease, and do that which the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us: When you come to this blessing and approach your wife, you must mention God's name and say, 'O God, keep Satan away from me, and keep Satan away from that which You grant me.' Then, when a Muslim goes to his wife and conceives a child, Satan will have no way of getting to it. Some scholars say that the child will not be vulnerable to the influence of sorcery. Why is all this? It is because when you plant, i.e. conceive, you remember that the real planter was God *the Most High*.

As long as you recognise the Creator and planter, you give your child eternal protection. On the contrary, a child, whose father forgot to mention God when he went to his wife, will fall prey to demons.

‘...But first provide something good for your souls...’ that is, provide for them that which will give you ease, and extend your lives and your works in life; for when you approach the matter with the intention of conceiving a child, and you remember God and seek refuge from Satan, the Creator will bless you with a good child who will pray for you, and teach his own children to pray for you, and his grandchildren will pray for you, and this will continue so that your action does not end until the end of time; and in this way you will have provided for your soul the best thing that could be provided.

Suppose that you are blessed with a child and then he dies; you grieve for him and anticipate recompense and remuneration for him from God; you will have sent him ahead of you to close one of the doors of hell for you. For this reason, in every situation you must remember: ‘...but first provide something good for your souls...’ And the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...and fear God, and know that you will meet Him. And give glad tidings to the believers.’ The meaning of ‘fear God’ is: Beware of incurring your Lord’s wrath in any of these actions; and be, o Muslim, with this fear, completely certain that you will meet God, and never doubt in this meeting. As long as you will be conscious of God and certain you will meet Him, you will not need to do more than rejoice in glad tidings of paradise.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَلَا تَجْعَلُوا اللَّهَ عُرْضَةً لِأَيْمَانِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوا وَتَتَّقُوا
وَتُصْلِحُوا بَيْنَ النَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

**[Believers], do not allow your oaths in God’s name to hinder you from doing good, being mindful of God and making peace between people. God hears and knows everything [224]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 224)**

The verse encompasses three things: firstly, virtuous deeds, and one might hate virtue because it is difficult for the soul; secondly, God-fearing, that is

keeping away from evil, and God-fearing is also difficult sometimes; and thirdly, making peace between people, that is reconciling quarrelling parties, though making peace between men might be strenuous – and all this is after you refrain from allowing your oaths in the name of God to become an obstacle to this.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘And do not make [your oath by] God an obstacle....’ An obstacle (*‘urda*) is a barrier which comes between two things, and the word (*‘urda*) also means ‘suitable’, as when you say ‘So-and-so is suitable for any task.’ An obstacle, as we said, is something which comes between two things, as when one puts his hand over his eyes so he cannot see the light; in this case the hand is an ‘obstacle’ between the person’s eyes and the sun, and he shields his eyes from the light in this way.

It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* were saying: I do not want oaths by Me to be an obstacle between a person and his good deeds, virtue and keeping away from evil. When someone asks you to be kind to someone who treated you badly, you might say, ‘I swore not to treat this person kindly.’ By doing this, you make your oath in God’s name a barrier between yourself and virtue.

In saying this, the True Lord *the Most High* wants to alert us to the fact that it is not permissible for oaths sworn in His name to prevent virtue, the maintenance of family ties, or promoting peace between men. If someone makes an oath to do something and then, sees that another course of action is better, let him do what is best and expiate his oath. Why? Because when the believer makes an oath not to do something good, he is making God a barrier between himself and goodness, and in this way the believer contradicts himself by making the barrier an oath in God’s name. God is the One Who commanded virtue, God-fearing, and promoting peace between men, this is why the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘And do not make [your oath by] God an obstacle....’ That is, the True Lord *the Most High* wants to protect acts of virtue, God-fearing, and promoting peace between men.

If you make an oath, o believer, not to do these deeds, the True Lord *the Most High* wants you to break this oath and to do acts of virtue, piety, and the promotion of peace between men so that you do not contradict God’s Law. If we find that everyone in society has acted with virtue, and every person has

steered clear of sin, and everyone who sees a dispute between two parties acts to resolve this dispute, is this not entering wholly into Islam? So, the True Lord *the Most High* wants the means of goodness to remain open to the people, and for them not to bar themselves from them.

The True Lord *the Most High* is the One who commands that the believer not make oaths a barrier between himself and goodness, or between himself and piety, or between himself and the promotion of peace between men. Islam is lenient in the matter of breaking oaths for the sake of virtue, and the pious predecessors used to say, ‘There is no oath-breaking better than that which is for the sake of virtue.’ So, when society is filled with acts of virtue, God-fearing, and the promotion of peace between adversaries, it will live up to God’s words: ‘...enter into Islam completely...’ (*al-Baqara*: 208).

A person might use any kind of excuse to avoid having to do virtuous deeds, keeping away from evil, and the promotion of peace between men, and might even do something which excuses him and makes it seem as though he is acting in obedience to God’s command. Let us give as an example of this in what happened with our master Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *God be pleased with him*, when Mistah ibn Athatha joined in with those who accused the Mother of the Believers, the Lady Aisha *God be pleased with her* of the false charge.

The gist of the matter is that ‘Aisha *God be pleased with her*, the wife of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, went out with the Noble Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to the battle of Banu Al-Mustaliq which was after the time when the command for women to veil themselves had been given, so ‘Aisha *God be pleased with her* went in a *howdah*.

The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* finished the battle, and the time came to return home, but ‘Aisha *God be pleased with her* found a necklace of hers was missing; and she was very light because there was not much food at that time. ‘Aisha *God be pleased with her* went to search for her missing necklace, and when they picked up her *howdah*, they did not notice that she was not inside it. ‘Aisha *God be pleased with her* found the missing necklace, but the army was far ahead of her. She expected that they would miss her and come back for her; and behind the army came Safwan ibn Al-Mu‘attal As-Salami. ‘Aisha *God be pleased with her* recognised him, and he made his

camel kneel down for her, and 'Aisha *God be pleased with her* returned to Medina. The gossip of the false charge spread around by efforts of 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Saloul, the chief of the hypocrites.

Distress and sorrow afflicted the Lady 'Aisha *God be pleased with her* for a long time, and then, the True Lord *the Most High* announced the falsity of this rumour. So a rumour had spread about the Mother of the Believers 'Aisha *God be pleased with her*, who was the wife of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and the daughter of Abu Bakr. Abu Bakr *God be pleased with him* was the faithful friend of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and even if what happened to 'Aisha *God be pleased with her* had happened to anyone else, the position of Abu Bakr *God be pleased with him* would have been the same when his relative Mistah ibn Athatha joined in the spreading of the false charge with the others who did so, and then God *the Most High* absolved 'Aisha *God be pleased with her* and revealed the words which declared the Mother of the Believers *God be pleased with her* free from this false charge. Abu Bakr *God be pleased with him* used to give Mistah an allowance, and after that incident, he cut him off and said, 'By God, I will never spend on him again!' Why? This was because he had shared in the spreading of the false charge. On the surface, this seemed to be the right thing to do since Mistah ibn Athatha had indulged in spreading the false charge; but look at the standards of perfection, beauty and virtue which God wants us to have: The True Lord *the Most High* showed that this was one way, but there was also another more favourable way, in instructing those of the believers who have been graced with God's favour and ease of life never to vow to stop helping their near of kin, the needy and those who emigrated from their land in the Way of God, but let them pardon and forbear. Then God puts forth to them the question: Do they not desire that God forgive their sins? God is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful (*an-Nur*: 22).

If you like God *the Most High* to forgive you, will you not forgive the one who does you wrong? Since you want God to forgive you, forgive other people for their mistakes. The True Lord *the Most High* said this to Abu Bakr *God be pleased with him* because he took a stance with someone who indulged in spreading the false charge with the others who did so, yet, He told him that this was not right.

God *the Most High* says, ‘And do not make [your oath by] God an obstacle for not doing virtuous deeds and keeping away from evil....’ Do not say, ‘I swore an oath by God that I would not do that good deed;’ rather, do it, and God will be pleased for you to break your oath and atone for it.

‘And do not make [your oath by] God an obstacle for not doing virtuous deeds and keeping away from evil and making peace among people; and God is All-Hearing, All Knowing.’ God *the Most High* is telling us: I do not want you to make your oaths in My name an obstacle, i.e. a barrier or an impediment against doing good. For example, if you are asked to be kind to a person who has ill-treated you, do not say, ‘I swore an oath not to treat him kindly because he does not deserve it;’ in this case, you will have made an oath by God a barrier to virtue. It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* wants to say to you: No; I will excuse this oath in My name; if you swear an oath not to act with virtue, God-fearing, and promoting peace between rivals, I will excuse this oath.

The Hadith says: ‘If someone swears an oath, and then sees that another course of action is better, let him do what is best and atone for his oath.’⁽¹⁾ In this way, God *the Most High* protects acts of virtue, piety and promoting peace between men even if you have sworn an oath by God not to do them. Why? Because when you swear an oath by God not to do them, and you make God *the Most High* the impediment to them, you contradict the Sacred Law itself, for God commands virtue, promoting peace, and piety; so, do not make a human oath an impediment to following the way of the Lord of men.

‘And do not make [your oath by] God an obstacle for not doing virtuous deeds and keeping away from evil and making peace among people....’ If you make an oath to refrain from doing something which is obligatory, it is obligatory for you to take back the oath, break it, and atone for it. The same ruling applies to the one who prevents people from benefiting from his property such as his horse or mule, or machinery, or car under the pretence that he has sworn an oath not to loan them out, which happens a lot in the countryside.

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by saying, ‘...and God is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.’ He *the Exalted* hears the oath you swear, and He

(1) Narrated by Imam Muslim, At-Tirmidhi, and Imam Ahmad in his Musnad on the authority of Abu Hurayra God be pleased with him

knows whether your intention was good or evil; so, do not make your oath an excuse for preventing virtue, piety and promoting peace. When the True Lord *the Most High* speaks about oaths, He makes one of the basics for judging an oath whether it was made sincerely or thoughtlessly; and out of His mercy, God only gives weight to oaths which are made from the heart, that is, those oaths which the one who makes them truly intends not to break; as for oaths made rashly and thoughtlessly, God excuses them.

Take, for example, the oaths which slip from people's tongues, such as when they say, 'By God, if you had not done that, I would have done such-and-such with you,' or 'By God, I will visit you', or 'By God, I did not mean that', or oaths which are based on supposition such as when you swear saying, 'By God, such-and-such happened' when you are not completely certain that it happened, but you do not mean to lie.

As for a false oath, it is an oath and a vow which you know to be a lie so that you swear the opposite of what you know, such as, when you see someone stealing or murdering and you swear by God that he did not steal or murder. Because of all this, God *the Most High* passed final judgement on this matter by saying:

لَا يُؤَاخِذُكُمُ اللَّهُ بِاللَّغْوِ فِي أَيْمَانِكُمْ وَلَكِنْ يُؤَاخِذُكُمْ بِمَا
كَسَبَتْ قُلُوبُكُمْ وَاللَّهُ عَفُورٌ حَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٢٥﴾

**He will not call you to account for oaths you have uttered unintentionally, but He will call you to account for what you mean in your hearts. God is most forgiving and forbearing [225]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 225)**

It was appropriate for this verse to come after all that came before it because He *the Exalted* clarified for us the oath which does not count, as though He were saying of it: Go back on it, and break it, and I will accept your going back on it if in return you act with virtue and God-fearing and promote peace between men. If He accepted that we go back on these kinds of oaths, it is because they are replaced by doing good deeds. God's words '...what your hearts have earned...' means exactly the same as what He said elsewhere: '...But He will impose blame on you for oaths which you have sworn in earnest...' (*al-Ma'ida*: 89).

That is that which is tied fast in the soul, and which is firm in your soul; but God does not impose blame on oaths that runs off the lips. ‘God does not impose blame upon you for what is unintentional in your oaths....’ The word ‘oaths’ (*ayman*) is the plural of *yamin*. It means an oath or a vow. It was called *yamin* because in the past, when they swore oaths, they would each place their right (*yamin*) hand on the hand of the other as the right hand is the limb of action.

A propos of which, do not think that the active limb acts because of training and practice; it only acts by its creation, i.e. by the way God *the Most High* created it, and it is compelled to act according to its created nature.

This is why you may find someone whose right hand does not function and who uses his left hand instead. Do not try to make him use his right hand instead of his left because your efforts will be in vain and come to nothing; for the reason he uses his left hand instead of his right is because of how he was created; it is the part of the brain which controls movement that decides this. If it is created on the right side of the brain, the left hand will be the active one; if it is created on the left side of the brain, the right hand will be the one which works.

This is why you sometimes find that the one who writes with the left hand has better handwriting than the one who writes with the right hand. Because of this, we say that it is wrong to try and change the way of someone who uses his left hand and not his right since this is futile and will not be fruitful.

Sometimes you find that the part of the brain that controls movement is in the dead centre of the brain, in which case the left and right hands will both work with equal competency; this is why we find some people who can write with their left and right hands equally swiftly and well, and can use them both spontaneously and naturally. God *the Most High* has many ways of creating, and He shows us that He is not governed by any rules; He is capable of making the right hand work, and capable of making the left hand work, and capable of making both hands work equally well, or to make neither hand able to work. It is not something mechanical which is outside God’s Will, but rather, everything is subject to His Will.

‘God does not impose blame upon you for what is unintentional in your oaths....’ Another word for oath in Arabic is *half*, which also means ‘consolidation’; it is derived from the word *half*, which means for people to join together for a certain task. When we come together to do something, we share the work between us, and when we do this, it becomes easier for all of us to do it.

‘God does not impose blame upon you for what is unintentional in your oaths, but He imposes blame upon you for what your hearts have earned. And God is Forgiving and Forbearing.’ Earning is a deliberate act; and when you swear by God unintentionally, He does not take you to task for it, which shows that God *the Most High* is ‘...Forgiving and Forbearing.’

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

لِّلَّذِينَ يُؤْلُونَ مِن نِّسَائِهِمْ تَرَبُّصُ أَرْبَعَةِ أَشْهُرٍ فَإِنْ فَاءُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

**For those who swear that they will not approach their wives,
there shall be a waiting period of four months: if they go back,
remember God will be most forgiving and merciful [226]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 226)**

Sometimes, some men ‘...swear not to have sexual relations with their wives....’ This is because a man sometimes feels he needs to discipline his wife, and he sleeps apart from her without making any vow or oath. Some men do not have enough will power to keep away from their wives, so, they take oaths not to approach them so that the oath will be a barrier for them, and an encouragement to be firm in doing this. This was part of the custom of the Arabs before Islam.

A man would refrain from sleeping with his wife for any length of time he wanted, and some of them would vow not to approach his wife for a specific period of time, and before this time ended, they would make another vow to extend the period of time again; this continued until the practice became a way of debasing one’s wife and frustrating her, and refusing to grant her marital rights; and this was a denial of the wife’s right to enjoy her husband.

The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to put an end to this practice; and He did not end it in order to favour one side over the other, but rather with the

justice of the All-Wise Creator, the Dispenser of Mercy to His creatures. It was possible for Him to ban it and prohibit it completely, and forbid people from doing it, but He *the Exalted* knows the hidden aspects and nature of the human soul: a woman might see that she can take advantage of her husband being attracted to her, either because of her beauty or his passion, and try to degrade him by means of this; therefore God gave the man the right to abstain from his wife for up to four months; as for longer than this, a woman cannot bear for her husband to abstain from her so long.

‘For those who swear not to have sexual relations with their wives is a waiting time of four months, but if they return [to normal relations] - then indeed, God is Forgiving, Merciful.’ Islam wants married life to be based on a realistic foundation, not on biased and partial notions which do not confirm to reality; it recognises inclinations, and does not do away with them, but rather elevates them; and it recognises instincts, and does not suppress them, but rather regulates them.

There is a difference between regulation and repression: repression gives the opportunity for the disease to worsen surreptitiously until it explodes in the tendencies of the human soul in an abnormal way with no caution; but regulation recognises instincts and inclinations, and only tries to guide them, not do away with them. Mankind submit to this principle in all of their actions, even their manufacture: for example, those who produce steam boilers, put vents in these boilers in which gas might build up pressure which will cause them to explode –so that if there is excess pressure, it can be released; and they might design an automatic system within them that works without human interference so that the machine controls itself.

The True Lord *the Most High* placed a clear ordered system in His creatures whom He created, and He established for them the family structure on sound foundations. Islam builds this system firstly on the soundness, purity, and oneness of doctrine so that there would not be a multitude of influences on the family’s components, and therefore it forbade Muslim men marrying idolatresses, and forbade Muslim women marrying idolaters. After this, it taught us the meaning of the instinctive union of a married couple; and the True Lord *the Most High* did not want to give free rein to instincts at all times of married life, so He made menstruation a time in which sexual intercourse is forbidden, saying, ‘...do not

approach them until they are pure' (*al-Baqara*: 222). This way, the True Lord *the Most High* regulated sexual relations between the married couple in a sound and pure way.

The True Lord *the Most High* knows that the human soul is subject to vicissitudes because man is temporal, and has a beginning and an end, and everything which is temporal must undergo change. If a man meets with a woman, this meeting must be done in the light of the way of God because if the meeting takes place according to the way of men and their emotions, it will end in failure for the ways of men are changing and ephemeral; and this is why the meeting of man and woman must take place according to God's standards.

God *the Most High* knows that the soul has inclinations and variables, and it is very possible that differences might occur between a married couple, which is why God *the Most High* makes breathing spaces in which the husband can resort to discipline which creates refinement and preservation; and therefore, He allowed man, if he sees that his wife is degrading him with her beauty and attractiveness, and the man might have a particular disposition and desire for such things – God allowed him a period of time in which he may take an oath not to approach his wife. God *the Most High* did not make this period of time free for the man to decide, but rather, He restricted it to this particular oath in order that the matter be properly regulated.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants healing, not cruelty. Were the man not regulated with an oath, he might change his mind and go to his wife, which is why the True Lord *the Most High* said, 'For those who swear not to have sexual relations with their wives is a waiting time of four months....' That is, you are allowed, o husband, to vow not to approach your wife for four months; but if the period extends over four months, it will not be discipline, but rather abuse; and the Creator *the Most High* wants discipline, not abuse. If this period is exceeded, the husband will thereby have transgressed, and will have no right to do so.

The True Lord *the Most High* is the One Who created inclinations, emotions and instincts, and made sound laws for them; and He *the Exalted* leaves for us things which indicates this. During the caliphate of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab

God be pleased with him, ‘Umar was once walking in the dead of night when he heard a woman saying the famous lines of verse:

This night is long and dark,

And keeps me awake with no companion to play with,

And by God, were it not that God’s punishment is fearsome,

The sides of this bed would be shaken off.

This means that the woman – whose husband was away in war – was suffering from a longing for her husband, and this suffering was almost enough to make her act improperly, but her fear of God *the Most High* prevented her from going astray. We might well ask how it was possible for ‘Umar *God be pleased with him* to hear this woman whilst he was walking in the street. I say that the woman who feels this way sings in the stillness of the night, and when the night is still and there is no clamour, it is easy to hear what is being said within houses. Did ‘Umar *God be pleased with him* not hear the words of the woman who argued with her daughter about adulterating milk?

When ‘Umar *God be pleased with him* heard the words of this woman who was suffering from longing for her husband, he went, with his sound disposition and acute awareness, to his daughter Hafsa, the Mother of the Believers *God be pleased with her*, and said to her, ‘How long can a woman go without her husband?’ She replied, ‘Between four and six months.’

Upon this, ‘Umar⁽¹⁾ *God be pleased with him* established a practice which became a law thereafter, which is that no Muslim soldier should have to be separated from his wife for longer than four months. So the words of the True Lord *the Most High* ‘For those who swear not to have sexual relations with their wives is a waiting time of four months...’ came before this incident involving ‘Umar *God be pleased with him*, after which the True Lord *the Most High* left it for the reality of life to show us the truth of what He had legislated for us, and ‘Umar *God be pleased with him* came to derive this ruling from the reality of life.

(1) One of the names of ‘Umar ibn Al-Khaṭṭab *God be pleased with him* was *Al-Farouk*, which means ‘the one who separates’ in Arabic. He was named so because he was always clear about truth from falsehood and was strong in standing for what is right.

Then God says, ‘...but if they return [to normal relations]...’ that is, if the man returns and wants to approach his wife before the four months have passed, he can atone for his oath, and that is that. But if the four months pass and the estrangement continues past its bounds, the man is commanded either to go back on his oath, or else to divorce his wife; and if the husband refuses to do so, the judge will force the divorce. Some jurists say that if the four months pass without the man going back, this counts as one finalised pronouncement of divorce. Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَإِنْ عَزَمُوا الطَّلَاقَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٢٧﴾

**but if they are determined to divorce,
remember that God hears and knows all [227]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 227)**

Scholars differ as to whether in this case, the wife is divorced with a finalised or non-finalised divorce. The meaning of a ‘non-finalised’ (*raj‘i*) is, as the Arabic name suggests, that the husband has the right to take back (*raja‘a*) his wife without her consent or permission; but as for finalised divorce, it means that he cannot take her back without making a new marriage contract and paying her a new dowry.

Divorce which comes from the four-month abstinence is a lesser separation, which requires a new marriage contract and dowry provided that it has not been preceded by two pronouncements of divorce. The greater separation, known as the triple divorce, is when a wife has been pronounced as divorced three times, in which case her husband cannot take her back unless she marries someone else and lives a proper married life with him, and then, he divorces her for whatever reason. After that, her old husband has the right to take her back with a new marriage contract and dowry, but only after he has endured the harsh jealousy of seeing her wife of another man. The True Lord *the Most High* presents this matter by saying, ‘For those who swear not to have sexual relations with their wives is a waiting time of four months, but if they return [to normal relations] - then indeed, God is Forgiving, Merciful. But if they are resolved on divorce, indeed, God is All-Hearing, All Knowing’ (*al-Baqara*: 226-227)

Islam is a realistic religion which gives the Muslim husband ways to vent his anger and ways to discipline his wife; but Islam does not want a man to persist with this discipline, and if he persists and goes beyond these four months, we say to him: There must be a limit which brings an end to this.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* speaks about the rulings of divorce, having previously spoken about marriage and abstinence which leads up to divorce.

When we reflect on Islam's stand concerning divorce, we find that it speaks realistically in a way which suits human inclinations; for as long as we are temporal beings subject to change, circumstances or feelings might affect the life of a married couple which they did not expect when they first married. When a person marries, he might be motivated by the burning of a single disposition, whilst after this, once life's realities come, many other dispositions influence him. The sexual instinct might overpower him and drive him to marry, and in seeking to satisfy his sexual desire, he might ignore the rest of the dispositions of his soul; and once he enters the reality of marriage, and the burning and passion of his instincts subside, his soul becomes aware of different qualities which he wishes to see in his wife, but which he does not find; and he asks himself what it was that hid them from him.

What hid them from him was the passion and fervour of sexual attraction. Before marriage, he looked at the woman from only one perspective, and did not consider any of the others. For example, the husband might find that his wife's character clashes with his own, and he might find that her way of thinking and her cultural attitude clash with his way of thinking and his cultural attitude, and he might find that there is no emotional concord between him and her, and that there is no mutual affection between them; and as we know, emotions have no laws.

It is possible that a man might find himself unable to suffice himself with a single sexual partner, and for this reason, he does not base his life on purity, yet he wants his wife to be pure and chaste in her life with him, whilst he gives himself the freedom to gain sexual experiences with more than one woman; or the opposite might be the case, wherein the man finds that one woman is enough for him, whilst the woman wants more than one man. Or, the man might be pure in his way of life, whilst his wife wants him to bring her money

in any way he can get it so that they differ. Or, the woman might be pure in her way of life so that she is not content that her husband earns money from an unlawful source.

Discord arises from such situations; discord comes when one of the spouses wants their life to be clean, pure and upright whilst the other is not concerned with this. This kind of scenario exists in the reality around us; how many houses suffer when family harmony is lost, and the view of one spouse about things conflicts with that of the other? This is the cause of the discord which arises between spouses when one of them does that which is not sufficient for the other; if a man and woman agree on chastity, purity and goodness, the affairs of their lives will be upright. For this reason, Islam brings its lofty rulings to accommodate all the factors of life, and the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَالْمُطَلَّقَاتُ يَرْجِعْنَ إِلَىٰ آبَائِهِنَّ ثَلَاثَةَ قُرُوءٍ وَلَا يَحِلُّ لَهُنَّ أَنْ يَكْتُمْنَ مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ فِي
أَرْحَامِهِنَّ إِنْ كُنَّ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَيَعْلَمْنَ الْحَقَّ بَرُوءَهُنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ إِنْ أَرَادُوا
إِصْلَاحًا وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَلِلرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٢٢٨﴾

Divorced women must wait for three monthly periods before remarrying, and, if they really believe in God and the Last Day, it is not lawful for them to conceal what God has created in their wombs: their husbands would do better to take them back during this period, provided they wish to put things right. Wives have [rights] similar to their [obligations], according to what is recognized to be fair, and husbands have a degree [of right] over them: [both should remember that] God is almighty and wise [228] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 228)

The whole verse contains legal rulings on life situations; the first of such rulings is: ‘Divorced women remain in waiting for three monthly courses....’ We can observe that the ruling is not given in the form of an imperative, but rather as a statement; He says, ‘Divorced women remain in waiting for three monthly courses....’ When the True Lord *the Most High* wants to give an obligatory ruling, He does not do so using the human imperative form, but

rather, He gives it as a statement, as this is a firmer and more decisive way of giving the ruling. How is this? This means that when the True Lord *the Most High* gives a command, the command is met by those who believe in Him with obedience, and this obedience applies to all elements so that no condition is excluded from it, and it becomes a fact which is related, not a ruling to be obeyed. As long as it has become a fact which is related, it is as though it has become a narrated history, which is: ‘Divorced women remain in waiting for three monthly courses...’ It is possible for us to understand the verse according to a different meaning, which is that God *the Most High* said, ‘Divorced women remain in waiting for three monthly courses...’, and so these words are a statement.

We said that statements can either be true or false; it is God who said this, and so whoever wants to believe God’s words must implement the ruling; and those who wish to challenge God *the Most High* by denying His words and not believing Him should not implement the ruling, and see in their own selves the sign of the lack of belief, which is manifest failure; is this not more of a coercion than for others? An example of this is God’s words that corrupt women are for corrupt men, and corrupt men, for corrupt women – just as good women are for good men, and good men, for good women. These are innocent of all that evil tongues may ascribe to them, forgiveness of sins shall be theirs, and a most excellent sustenance (*an-Nur*: 26).

Although this is a statement of fact, it is also an issued legislation which might be obeyed or disobeyed; but God *the Most High* wants from us that the matter be thus: ‘corrupt women are for corrupt men,’ which means that your Lord wants is to be that ‘corrupt women are for corrupt men,’ and that ‘good women are for good men;’ this does not mean that in reality it will inevitably be as the verse says, but rather, reality will be this way if we implement God’s instructions, and it will not be the case if we disobey God *the Most High* and rebel against His law. The same is the case with God’s statement that whoever enters the Sacred Mosque is secure (*Al-Imran*: 97).

This really means: Make all who enter the Sacred Mosque (*Ka’ba*) secure;’ and it is possible that someone might disobey God and not make the Sacred Mosque (*Ka’ba*) safe and secure. So God’s saying ‘Divorced women remain in waiting for three monthly courses...’ is a ruling of moral responsibility

which merits obedience from all who believe in God. God's words 'remain in waiting' (*yatarabbasna*) mean that they will wait, and the word used here is completely appropriate to the situation as the woman who waits (*mutarabbisa*) is the divorced woman, and 'divorced' means that she is not wanted, so, she stays and waits until her waiting-period is over, whereupon her esteem returns as she is now able to marry a new husband. The noble verse (in the Arabic original) has also the word *bi-anfusihinna* ('by themselves,' absent in the English rendering) after the term 'remain in waiting,' even though the one who waits is the same as the one who is divorced; this is because the mindful, responsible self and the evil-commanding self would be in turmoil all of this time, which is 'three monthly courses.' The word *quru* ('courses') is the plural of (*qar*) which can either mean menstruation or the time of purity in between two menstruations. When the True Lord *the Most High* says, 'three monthly courses,' which of these does He mean? Does it mean the time of menstruation, or purity? The meaning here is purity because He said *thalathat* ('three') in the Arabic numeral form which is used with masculine Arabic nouns, not with feminine nouns, and the Arabic word for a menstrual period (*hayda*) is feminine, whilst the word for a period of purity (*tuhr*) is masculine; so 'three monthly courses' means three consecutive periods of purity. The reason for this is to make sure that she is not pregnant, as well as to give the couple some time to reconcile; for perhaps after the first or second period of purity one might begin to miss the other, and things might go back to how they were; but once the three periods of purity are over, there is no hope or expectancy of reconciliation.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says, '...and it is not lawful for them to conceal what God has created in their wombs....' What does creation mean? Creation means to bring into existence something which did not exist, and this thing which did not exist could either be a pregnancy or a menstrual period. The pregnant woman has her own waiting-term, as it is specified in God's words that those who are with child, the end of their waiting-term shall come when they deliver their burden (*at-Talaq*: 4).

As for a woman who is not pregnant, her waiting-term is that she menstruates and becomes pure three times. There is also a third situation which concerns such women who are beyond the age of monthly courses, as well as for such

who do not have any courses, their waiting-period – if there is any doubt about it – shall be three calendar months (*at-Talaq*: 4). That is, if a woman's monthly cycle has finished, her waiting-term is 'three calendar months, and the same ruling applies to the one who is too young to have begun menstruating, i.e. her waiting-term is three months. So the system of waiting-terms has several situations:

- If she is not pregnant, her waiting-term is three *quru'*, i.e. three periods of purity, if she has a menstrual cycle.
- If she is pregnant, her waiting-term ends when she gives birth.
- If she is not pregnant and has reached the menopause and so no longer menstruates, or if she is too young to have begun menstruating, in both cases the waiting-term is three months.

God's words '...and it is not lawful for them to conceal what God has created in their wombs...' indicate that a woman testifies to her own condition, and no one else has the right to inspect her, and she is the one who reports the matter herself, declaring whether she is pregnant or not. And she must not conceal this; for she might be pregnant but then, conceal what is in her womb so that she does not have to wait the entire waiting-term for a pregnant woman, and then, marry another man so the child is ascribed to other than his true father; for pregnancies usually last nine months, but there are exceptions to this, and some pregnancies last only seven months, and sometimes only six. A divorced woman might remarry after three months and then claim she is pregnant by the new husband and that her pregnancy has only lasted seven or six months.

Some of us might know the story of the woman whose pregnancy lasted only six months: a woman was brought to 'Uthman *God be pleased with him* because she had given birth six months after marrying, and he wanted to punish her for adultery, but Imam 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *God be pleased with him* intervened saying, 'How can you punish her for fornication for giving birth after six months; have you not read the words of the True Lord *the Most High*?' Othman *God be pleased with him* asked, 'And what did the True Lord *the Most High* say

about this?' Imam 'Ali *God be pleased with him* recited God's words stating that divorced mothers may nurse their children for two whole years (*al-Baqara*: 233). That is, they nurse the child for a period of twenty-four months; and another verse says that a mother bears her child in pain, and in pain she gives him birth; and her bearing him and his utter dependence on her take thirty months (*al-Ahqaf*: 15). If we take from the first verse twenty-four months, which is the period of weaning, and subtract it from the thirty months which combine pregnancy with weaning in the second verse, we understand that pregnancy could last only six months. Upon this, our master 'Uthman *God be pleased with him* said, 'By God, This did not occur to me!'

So, a six-month pregnancy is possible, and from here we understand the wisdom of God's words: '...and it is not lawful for them to conceal what God has created in their wombs....' so that a woman cannot claim she is not pregnant and then marry another man and ascribe a child to him who is not his flesh and blood, and more than one problem can arise because of this, including the fact that the child will not inherit from his real father, and his unmarriageable kin will not be forbidden to him so that his half-sister from his true father will not be deemed his sister, and the same for his aunts, and everything will be turned upside-down – and these are only the problems relating to his true father.

As for the case of the second husband, the child will take from him rights which are not lawfully his; he will inherit from him, and the second husband's unmarriageable kin will become his unmarriageable kin too, so he will be in their company whilst they are uncovered without having the right to do so, and unlawful mixing will take place.

So, God's words '...and it is not lawful for them to conceal what God has created in their wombs...' is a ruling which the True Lord *the Most High* wants to be observed so that life can be established on purity, nobility and chastity, and in which no one violates the rights of anyone else. This is with respect to pregnancies, but what about the matter of menstruation?

It is also not lawful for her to conceal her menses in order to make her waiting-term with her husband last longer. The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...if they believe in God and the Last Day....' What is the relationship

between belief and legal rulings? It is a firm relationship because pregnancy, or menstruation is a secret thing which is not governed by public laws, but rather the thing which governs each is the act of faith; for this reason, it is said that ‘only the unseen oversees the unseen’: as long as something cannot be seen, no one can oversee it except *the Most High* Unseen Being, God.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says, ‘...And their husbands have more right to take them back in this [period]....’ The Arabic word *ba’l* means ‘husband’, and also means lord, master, and owner. During the waiting-term, the husband has the right to take his wife back. God *the Most High* says, ‘...And their husbands have more right to take them back in this [period]....’ Does this mean there are others besides the husband who are also entitled to take the wife back, since the True Lord *the Most High* used the word *ahaqq* which literally means ‘have more right,’ which apparently seems to give others besides the husbands the right to take the wives back? No; the meaning is that there is no entitlement for anyone here but the husband. To take the wife back during the waiting-term is the right of the husband, and the wife cannot say no, nor can the guardian of the wife. If the husband wants to take his wife back, and she declines and refuses, his will takes precedence over hers, and he has more right than she does, and he does not have to pay regard to what she says; she does not have a right in this matter since she accepted him in the first place. As for once the waiting-term has passed, the matter is different: there must be a guardian, and a new marriage contract, and a new dowry; and the wife’s agreement is essential.

‘...And their husbands have more right to take them back in this [period]....’ This is if they desire reconciliation, and desire is an unseen feeling. It is as though this is a warning to the couple that the law allows them to reconcile, but if the husband wants to take her back just in order to harm her for his own reasons, the religion says to him: No; you are not entitled to do that; although the law allows him to take her back, God forbids him to do this injustice. It is the right of the husband to take back his wife lawfully for the sake of chastity, integrity and matrimony, not for anything else. However, if he has wicked hidden motives such as to harm her and take vengeance on her, the religion does not allow him to do so.

Legally speaking, the law gives him the right to take her back, and no one can stand in his way, no matter what the motives of his soul might be, but if he has evil intentions behind this, he will carry the burden of sin for his actions. The True Lord *the Most High* then says, '...And due to the wives is similar to what is expected of them, according to what is reasonable....' That is, the wife has the same rights as the husband; but what are their rights, and what are their responsibilities? The equality here is of sex, and each of them has a right over the other according to their nature. The husband provides the wife with certain services, and the wife provides him with other services in return; for married life is based on shared responsibilities: the man has responsibilities determined by his nature as a male, and the woman has responsibilities determined by her nature as a female. The man is required to work and toil in order to spend, and the woman is required to make for the man a home in which he can take solace from her when he comes home from doing his job in life. This is why God *the Most High* says that among His signs is that He creates for us mates out of our own kind so that, we find rest with them, and He engenders love and tenderness between us: in this, indeed, there are signs for people who reflect (*ar-Rum*: 21).

To find rest with something is the opposite of going to work; and 'find rest with them' means that you work all day in order to earn provisions, and then, you go home to find peace with your wife. The man must work, and the woman must make a good home life and pleasant atmosphere for him, with tender and warm relations. The responsibilities are shared fairly: you have rights which are incumbent on the other, and the other has rights which are incumbent on you.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...But the men have a degree over them [in responsibility and authority]....' This is the degree of authority and guardianship. The degree of authority gives us a wider and more comprehensive concept, for every group must have a responsible custodian. Guardianship is responsibility, not supremacy, and he who takes guardianship as a chance to gain supremacy and control has perverted it from its proper purpose, for the basis of guardianship is that it is a responsibility by which the motions of life are organised.

There is no shame for a man to obey the directives of a woman in those things connected with her mission as a woman and in the areas of her service, that is, in women's matters; for just as a man has his area, a woman also has hers. The precedent for which man is raised is that he is more involved in worldly works, and this involvement means that the man has to spend on the woman in accordance with the statement of the True Lord *the Most High* that men have the degree of guardianship because they are supposed to spend out of their possessions (*an-Nisa'*: 34). So spending is a man's duty and responsibility, and he should know that God *the Most High* is Mighty, and does not like to see a man degrade a woman whom He created; and God is All-Wise, and able to retaliate for a woman when man understands that his precedence over her is for domination, or if a woman understands that her goodness towards a man is a special favour from her to him; for there should be no degradation in marriage because marriage is based on love and good will.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

الطَّلُقُ مَرَّتَانٍ فَإِمْسَاكِ بِمَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ تَسْرِيجٍ بِإِحْسَنٍ وَلَا يَحِلُّ لَكُمْ أَنْ تَأْخُذُوا مِمَّا
ءَاتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ شَيْئًا إِلَّا أَنْ يَخَافَا أَلَّا يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ اللَّهِ فَلَا جُنَاحَ
عَلَيْهِمَا فِيمَا افْتَدَتْ بِهِ تِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ فَلَا تَعْتَدُوهَا وَمَنْ يَتَعَدَّ حُدُودَ اللَّهِ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ ﴿٢٢٩﴾

Divorce can happen twice, and [each time] wives either be kept on in an acceptable manner or released in a good way. It is not lawful for you to take back anything that you have given [your wives], except where both fear that they cannot maintain [the marriage] within the bounds set by God: if you [arbiters] suspect that the couple may not be able to do this, then there will be no blame on either of them if the woman opts to give something for her release. These are the bounds set by God: do not overstep them. It is those who overstep God's bounds who are doing wrong [229] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 229)

Here, the True Lord *the Most High* is speaking about divorce, having just spoken about a divorced woman's waiting-term and how she can be returned and taken back. He *the Exalted* is now speaking about divorce in itself; and the

Arabic word for divorce (*talaq*) is derived from a word meaning to be set free and liberated. It is as though it is the untying of a bond which existed, namely the bond of marriage; and the bond of marriage was made by God *the Most High* as a solemn bond, and a solemn pledge, as He said that women, in marriage, receive a most solemn pledge from men (*an-Nisa'*: 21).

It is a solemn pledge because it makes the private parts of the spouses lawful for one another; noteworthy here is that God did not describe faith as a solemn pledge, but rather called it only a 'pledge', so, it is as though the pledge of marriage is more solemn than that of faith. The True Lord *the Most High* wants to instil in people the ability to seek solutions to their problems in the easiest way possible, which is why He allowed for us to untie the bond of marriage; and the end of the bond is not like its beginning: it is not thought-out. The beginning of the marriage was well thought-out, and we began it with consent, acceptance and witnesses, and when you began the thing you did so, after having thought about its demands and conditions. But divorce is different; for a man may not be able to hold back his overwhelming emotions, and he might do it for something trivial or for something which could have been overcome without resorting to divorce. So the True Lord *the Most High* wants to give people a chance to reflect and deliberate on untying this bond, so, He said, 'Divorce may be [done] twice...', that is, once and then, again. Someone might ask: How can it be twice, when we pronounce it three times? Indeed, a man once asked the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* this question, 'O Messenger of God, God *the Most High* says, 'Divorce may be [done] twice...', so why did it become thrice?' The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* smiled and said, '...Keep [them] in good fellowship, or release [them] with kindness....' It is as though the meaning of 'Divorce may be [done] twice...' is that you have, in your arena of choice, the ability to divorce a woman twice, whilst the third is not for you. Why? It is because after that, there will be a greater separation, and you will not have the right to take her back, and another man will have rights to this woman: It is God's ruling that after two divorces, the man cannot take his wife back in marriage until she first takes another man for husband (*al-Baqara*: 230).

And what if a man says to his wife, 'You are thrice divorced,' does this count as one pronouncement of divorce, or three? We say that time is an essential

condition of the occurrence of divorce; a man divorces his wife once, then, time passes and he divorces her again as a second divorce, then, time passes again, and then, after this we arrive to the situation referred to in God's words: '...Keep [them] in good fellowship, or release [them] with kindness....' So, the text of this verse is clear and direct in that a threefold divorce with a single statement is not counted as three divorces, but is rather only one divorce. It is true that our master 'Umar *God be pleased with him* made it count as three divorces; but that was because people had made light of the matter so, he wanted to be hard on them so they would stop abusive practice; but they did not stop it, and because of this we should return to the origin of the law as it came in the Quran, which is: 'Divorce may be [done] twice....'

The wisdom of spreading divorce over three times, and not in one single pronouncement, is that the True Lord *the Most High* wants to provide the chance to take it back; and the chance to take it back cannot come in a single breath or a single pronouncement. The man who says to his wife, 'You are thrice divorced,' has not taken the chance to search his soul; and if we consider this statement of his as amounting to three divorces, the entire married life will have been destroyed with a single utterance. But the greatness of the law is that the True Lord *the Most High* spread divorce into separate occasions so a person has a chance to search his soul; for he may have made a mistake the first time so that, he will be more careful the next time and regret what he did. When you find the law spreading out something which may or may not happen, there must be duration of time between each occurrence.

Some loudmouths want to justify to the people the criticisms they make against God's Way, so, they say: 'God *the Most High* declared that polygamy is not possible when He said to men that it will not be within their power to treat their wives with equal fairness, however much they may desire it (*an-Nisa*': 129). They say, 'God made fairness a condition of polygamy, and then He decreed that we will not be able to treat our wives fairly however much we may desire it, so, it is as though He changed His mind about the ruling.' This is their logic. We say to them: Finish reading the verse and you will understand its meaning. The True Lord *the Most High* says that it will not be within our power to treat our wives with equal fairness, however much we may desire it, and then, He adds

to this negation, saying that for this reason, we should not allow ourselves to incline totally to one wife and ignore the other (*an-Nisa'*: 129).

Since an exception has been made to the negation, this means that it has been negated, and it is as they say, 'Two negatives make an affirmative.' The ability is still there, and God's words that 'we should not allow ourselves to incline totally' allude to it.

The same is the case here with: 'Divorce may be [done] twice: Keep [them] in good fellowship, or release [them] with kindness....' Since He said '...Keep [them] in good fellowship, or release [them] with kindness...' and said 'Divorce may be [done] twice...' – that is every action has its time – this is appropriate with stages of disciplining and refinement, not with punishment and separation. On the other hand, a single threefold pronouncement of divorce all at once is a single forceful action which is devoid of any disciplining, reconciliation, or refinement. About this matter, the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...and it is not allowed for you to take back anything of what you have given to them....' This is because the purpose of the dowry is that the husband pays it for the enjoyment of his wife; so, if divorce takes place, it is not lawful for the divorcer to take back any of the dowry he paid; but the True Lord *the Most High* made an exception to this, saying, '...unless they both fear that they cannot keep within the bounds set up by God. And if you fear that they cannot keep within the bounds of God, no blame shall be on either of them for what the wife shall herself give for her redemption....'

It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to give the woman a way out if she is subjected to abuse which she will not accept; so, the True Lord *the Most High* decrees: If they fear they will not keep to God's bounds, the woman is allowed to release herself with some money; and for this it is disliked to be more than the amount of the dowry she received, unless this is the result of her recalcitrance and disobedience to her husband, in which case it is not blameworthy for more than the dowry to be paid.

Reality came to confirm what God had ordained when the events took place concerning Jamila the sister of 'Abdullah ibn Ubay. When she was married to 'Abdullah ibn Qais, she went to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'I do not accuse him of any shortcoming in his

religion or his character, but I do not wish to be faithless in Islam.’ She meant that she lived with him yet, disliked him, which meant she could not fulfil his rights; and this is faithlessness to a partner, i.e. a denial of the rights of the husband and his obedience.

She said that she did not accuse him of any shortcoming in his religion or his character in order to imply that there were other emotional reasons, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to know what these were, so she said, ‘I lifted the curtain and found him in a group of men, and he was the blackest, and the shortest, and the ugliest of them all.’ He *peace and blessings be upon him* said to her, ‘Will you return his dowry?’ She said, ‘If he wishes, I will give him more besides.’ He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘We do not need any increase, but return to him his dowry.’

This is called ‘release/redemption’ (*khul'*), i.e. for the wife to release herself from her husband if she fears she will not be able to fulfil any of his marital rights. She releases herself from him with money so that he is not harmed, for he may want to marry someone else and need a dowry to offer her. The True Lord *the Most High* then says, ‘...and it is not allowed for you to take back anything of what you have given to them....’ This is something about which God *the Most High*, in another verse, says that if a man wished to divorce his wife and marry another woman, and he had given the first wife a heap of gold, he should not take back anything of it (*an-Nisa'*: 20).

The True Lord *the Most High* then makes the exception: ‘...unless they both fear that they cannot keep within the bounds set up by God....’ This refers to the two spouses, and after this comes the responsibility of the families and guardians of the spouses and all those who are concerned with their situation: ‘...And if you fear that they cannot keep within the bounds of God, no blame shall be on either of them for what the wife shall herself give for her redemption. These are the bounds of God: so, do not overstep them; for whoever oversteps the bounds of God, they are the unjust.’

God’s bounds are those things which He has legislated for His servants as impassable bounds between the lawful and the unlawful. God’s bounds are either mentioned after prohibitions, or after commands. If they are mentioned after commands, He says, ‘...These are the bounds of God: so,

do not overstep them...' that is, they are as far as you can go; so, do not transgress the bound. But when they come after prohibitions, He says, '...these are the limits set up by God, so do not approach them...' (*al-Baqara*: 187) because the True Lord *the Most High* wants to prevent the soul from the effect of unlawful things which insist on it to commit them; if you are far from them, it is best to remain distant.

Look carefully at what the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The lawful is clear, and the unlawful is clear; and between them are doubtful matters, unknown to many people. And so those who stay clear of doubtful matters thereby free themselves of suspicion regarding their religion and their reputation; and those who fall into doubtful matters, fall into the unlawful, just like a shepherd who tends his flock near the reserved pasture, and is on the brink of entering it. Every king has his own reserved land, and the reserved land of God is all He has prohibited.'⁽¹⁾

As long as the bounds include God's prohibitions and commands, everything commanded and everything prohibited must remain within the domain of the command of 'do' and the prohibition of 'do not'. If the order of 'do', moves into the domain of 'do not', and that which enters the domain of 'do not', moves to the domain of 'do', the order of the universe will be disrupted; and once the order of the universe has been disrupted, injustice will have occurred, for injustice means to take the right of one man and give it to another. The ruling of divorce is one of God's bounds, and if you try and bring something which is not in line with what God has commanded for the social order, you transfer the commanded into the domain of prohibited, and by doing this you commit injustice.

When the True Lord *the Most High* treats the issues of society, He treats them in a way which prevents society from falling into illnesses and fatal diseases. Even if we think the best of human beings, and that they legislate for the sake of goodness and benefit, they legislate according to their own knowledge of things, but we cannot be sure that they will not be unaware of things that may happen of which they know nothing. They legislate for those things

(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nasa'i, and Ibn Maja

which they know, and if they legislate for those things they know, and are surprised by things which they did not know, what will the situation be? If they are truly sincere, they will overcome the arrogance of their legislative delusion and say, 'Let us change what we have legislated.' If they remain in their excess, who will suffer? The society will suffer as a result of their obstinacy.

The True Lord *the Most High* does not accuse any of mankind of having ill will, but there is a difference between wanting what is good and being unable to do what is good. You legislated according to your ability and your knowledge, and we all know that the misery of experimentation in theoretical social law falls on the society.

We know well that there is a difference between experimental practical science and theoretical capricious speech: Experimental science causes misery for the one who conducts the experiments; the scientist toils and labours in his laboratory, and he is the one who suffers and sacrifices his time, money and health, and lives in a state of distraction from everything, but the experiment he is working on. When he arrives at a discovery, it is society which delights in it. But it is different for theoretical things because it is society which suffers misery on account of the mistakes of human lawmakers, until a lawmaker who sympathises with society, come along to alter the mistake of those who came before him.

As for the True Lord *the Most High*, He sent us a legislation which protects mankind from misery; for God *the Most High* leaves us free in the experimental material world: Enter the laboratory, and you will arrive at things which you might agree upon; but beware of differences of caprice. Therefore, God undertook to legislate for those things in which caprices differ in order to ensure that society does not suffer misery because of the mistakes of legislators for a period of time until another legislator comes and alters for the people that which others erred in.

This is why we find in our modern world many issues which have arisen because of caprice, and in which people have clung to their caprices, and then events put pressure on them until they could not merely ignore the problems of their making any more, and they had to confront them; and when they confronted them, they found no solution for them except that which Islam has legislated; and we find that they are in agreement with the laws of Islam.

Some of those who hate Islam say: You say that your religion came to prevail over all other religions, as the Quran says in one place that it is God who has sent forth His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to make it prevail over every false religion; and God is sufficient witness (*al-Fath*: 28). And in another verse the Quran says that the infidels aim to extinguish God's light with their mouths; but God has willed to spread His light in all its fullness, however hateful this may be to the disbelievers. He it is Who has sent forth His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to make it prevail over all false religions, however hateful this may be to polytheists (*as-Saff*: 8-9).

These haters of Islam continue to say: Your Islam has not prevailed over all religions until now since there are millions of people who have not entered Islam. We say to them: Do you think that its prevalence over all religions means that everyone believes in Islam? No; they should have noticed that God *the Most High* says that it will prevail however hateful this may be to the disbelievers; they should have known that the prevailing of Islam over all religions must be accompanied by the existence of disbelievers who hate it; and as long as Islam exists alongside disbelievers who hate it, it will not have prevailed as a religion; but it will prevail over them, i.e. overwhelm them, as a system to which they will be forced to resort in order to solve the problems of their disbelieving societies, and they will take the systems and laws of Islam whilst hating it; which is why we find them seeking their laws and social reforms from the teachings of Islam.

If it meant that they would take it as a religion, the True Lord *the Most High* would not have said 'however hateful this may be to the disbelievers' or 'however hateful this may be to polytheists' because if they adopted it as a religion, there would be no haters or idolaters left. But when He *the Exalted* says, 'however hateful this may be to the disbelievers' and 'however hateful this may be to polytheists,' this means: Be sure, o you who believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and accept Islam as a religion, that the experiences of life will come to show the deniers the truth of your religion, and the truth of God in His legislation for you, and the disbelievers and idolaters will be forced to adopt many of the stances of your Islam and take them as a system to solve their problems, despite their obstinacy and determination to oppose Islam.

We gave an example for this before, of what happened in Italy, in which is located the Vatican, the spiritual centre of the Catholic faith, when they were forced to make a law allowing divorce, and the same thing happened in Spain and other countries. Look at how they turned back on their principles in relation to which they used to criticise Islam! The circumstances of life forced them to legalise divorce with a human law, not a Divine Law. These kinds of events show us how much we should trust our religion, and that the problems of people in lands of disbelief and idolatry cannot be solved without Islam; and if they do not accept it as a religion, they will be forced to accept it as a system.

It is a credit for Islam that they do not accept it as a religion, for if they believed in it, their actions and laws would be an application of Islam by a Muslim people; but if they continue to hate Islam and then accept the principles of the religion, they hate in order to reform their corrupted societies, this is a source of great pride for Muslims. This is the understanding of the words of the True Lord *the Most High* ‘however hateful this may be to the disbelievers’ and ‘however hateful this may be to polytheists.’ If anyone raises this issue to you, say: It is an honour for Islam that there remain in this world idolaters, and that there remain in this world those disbelievers, and then, they are forced to solve the problems of their societies with Islamic legislations; and Islam is proud that fourteen hundred years ago, it had already arrived at the things which they are still now chasing after all this time.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

فَإِنْ طَلَّقَهَا فَلَا تَحِلُّ لَهُ مِنْ بَعْدُ حَتَّى تَنْكِحَ زَوْجًا غَيْرَهُ ۖ فَإِنْ طَلَّقَهَا فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا أَنْ
يَرْجِعَا إِنْ ظَنَّا أَنْ يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ اللَّهِ ۚ وَتِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ يُبَيِّنُهَا لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٣٠﴾

If a husband re-divorces his wife after the second divorce, she will not be lawful for him until she has taken another husband; if that one divorces her, there will be no blame if she and the first husband return to one another, provided they feel that they can keep within the bounds set by God. These are God’s bounds, which He makes clear for those who know [230] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 230)

The True Lord *the Most High* said before that, ‘Divorce may be [done] twice...,’ after which He said, ‘...Keep [them] in good fellowship, or release

[them] with kindness....' Here in the verse under discussion, the True Lord *the Most High* speaks about dissolution, saying, 'And if he has divorced her [for the third time], then she is not lawful to him afterward until she has married a husband other than him....' This is in order to show us that if things between the married couple come to the point of no return, there must be a hard lesson, and they cannot return to one another easily. God *the Most High* gave them respite with the legislation of the lesser separation which was followed by a new dowry and marriage contract, but they were not deterred, and so there had to be a greater separation where the woman must marry another man and experience another married life; and in this way, the lesson is hard.

Some men might take this matter superficially, marrying a woman who has been divorced three times with a marriage which fulfils all the conditions of a contract, dowry and witnesses, but does not include any sexual contact between them. This is the so-called *muhallil* (the one who marries a divorced woman only in order to divorce her so she can remarry her first husband) which we hear about, and which Islam does not allow.

The one who marries a woman as a *muhallil*, and the woman who accepts this, should both know that this is unlawful for both of them. There is no *muhallil* in Islam, and if someone marries with the intention of being such a *muhallil*, the wife is not lawful for him, and he has no rights over her, and moreover if he then, divorces her it is not lawful for her to return to her previous husband because the *muhallil* was not a real husband, but only an actor playing the part of husband; and acting has nothing to do with reality. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...she is not lawful to him afterward until she has married a husband other than him....' This means a normal marriage which is instituted in the normal way without any machinations or intention to allow the woman to remarry her previous husband. When this man divorces her because of unintended circumstances which lead to irreconcilable differences, not for pre-arranged reasons, it is possible then, for the previous husband to marry the woman to whom he was previously married and then divorced three times.

'...And if the latter husband divorces her, there is no blame upon the woman and her former husband for returning to each other if they think that they can

keep [within] the bounds of God. These are the bounds of God, which He makes clear to people who know.’ That is, if it is deemed likely that the issues which were a cause of conflict before are now finished, and the couple have reached a state of mutual understanding and respect, and they have learned a lesson from the experience which has made each of them content with the other.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَإِذَا طَلَّقْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ فَلَبِنَ أَجَلَهُنَّ فَأَمْسِكُوهُنَّ بِمَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ سَرِّحُوهُنَّ بِمَعْرُوفٍ
وَلَا تُنْسِكُوهُنَّ ضِرَارًا لِنَعْتِدُوا وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ فَقَدْ ظَلَمَ نَفْسَهُ وَلَا تَتَّخِذُوا
ءَايَاتِ اللَّهِ هُزُوًا وَاذْكُرُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَمَا أَنْزَلَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ
وَالْحِكْمَةِ يَعِظُكُمْ بِهِ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٣١﴾

When you divorce women and they have reached their set time, then either keep or release them in a fair manner. Do not hold on to them with intent to harm them and commit aggression: anyone who does this wrongs himself. Do not make a mockery of God’s revelations; remember the favour He blessed you with, and the Scripture and wisdom He sent to teach you. Be mindful of God and know that He has full knowledge of everything [231] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 231)

We can observe here that God *the Most High* says, ‘And when you divorce women and they have [nearly] fulfilled their waiting-term...,’ and we ask: If, once they have reached the end of their waiting-term, is there any opportunity for retaining them according to acceptable terms or dissolving the marriage according to acceptable terms? Is there anything left but dissolution? The next verse says that when men divorce women, and they have come to the end of their waiting-term, they should not hinder them from marrying their husbands if they have agreed with each other in a fair manner (*al-Baqara*: 232).

So, we are faced with two verses each of which begins ‘And when you divorce women and they have [nearly] fulfilled their waiting-term...,’ yet the first verse continues: ‘...either retain them according to acceptable terms or release them according to acceptable terms...’ whilst the second verse continues by the

instruction not to hinder them from marrying their husbands (*al-Baqara*: 232). What, then, is the point of this difference?

We say that the verb *balagha* (used in the verses and rendered as '[nearly] fulfilled') has two meanings: The first meaning is 'to draw close to,' such as is the case with God's instruction to worshippers when they are about to pray, to wash their faces (*al-Ma'ida*: 6), that is, when you are close to begin praying, do so. The second meaning is the actual real arrival at the thing. When a person travels in a plane and lands at the destination, he notices that the pilot announces that they have arrived in whatever city it is. So sometimes to come to the end (*balagha*) means to be close to it, whilst other times it means to have actually reached it.

The first verse says, 'And when you divorce women and they have [nearly] fulfilled their waiting-term, either retain them according to acceptable terms or release them according to acceptable terms....' In this case, the man has divorced his wife, but her waiting-term has not ended yet, but rather, it is so close to ending that he can either let her go, or retain her in a goodly manner; there is enough time left of the waiting-term for the husband to choose either to retain, or let go, but not much time. The True Lord *the Most High* wants the husband to hold on to the preservation of the marriage until the last moment, and for the means to reconciliation, not separation, to remain until the last moment. This is the reason for the wording '...and they have [nearly] fulfilled their waiting-term...' that is, they are close to the end of the waiting-term. The True Lord *the Most High* wants us to hold onto the preservation of married life until the last possible chance we have for it, which is a moment in which the man might utter a word which either leads to divorce, or to the return to married life.

The second verse says that when men divorce women, and they have come to the end of their waiting-term, they should not hinder them from marrying their husbands if they have agreed with each other in a fair manner (*al-Baqara*: 232). God *the Most High* wants to restrict the discussion of whether to separate, or continue to the husband and wife alone so that no one but the husband and wife becomes involved in their affair because there exists between the two of them that which might make one of them soften towards the other.

But if a third party intervenes who does not have these sensibilities, the quarrel will be magnified in his mind, and, at the same time, he does not feel the need for reconciliation, and he will not seek to save the relationship of the couple. If the father, brother, or mother gets involved in the discussion, enmity will arise, and they will not feel the emotions that each spouse feels towards the other, nor the tenderness of the husband towards his wife, nor the wife's will to reconcile with her husband. These emotional matters only exist between the husband and wife; as for outside parties, they are only connected to the husband or wife by a family tie, and because of this, the desire of these outside parties to preserve the relationship of the couple, will not be like the desire of each spouse to hold on to the other.

Because of this, we must understand that every problem which arises between a husband and a wife, and which no one else interferes in, is resolved quickly without a father, mother, or brother's involvement. This is because the interference of an outside party will not have the same emotional and psychological motivations which exist between the couple; as for the couple themselves, a single glance from one of them to the other might be enough to bring things back to normal. The man might be amazed by the woman's beauty and yearn for her, and forget everything; and the woman might see in the man something which she does not want to lose, and forget what happened between them, and so on.

But will this be the case with her mother and his, or her father and his? There are no secrets, emotions, relations, or anything else between these people and the couple. For this reason, I always advise that differences be kept between the husband and wife because God *the Most High* has placed an emotional connection between them, and this emotional connection might lead to longing and desire for something, and this desire might be the thing to bring about reconciliation and make each side withdraw from enmity and divorce. For this reason, God's Will decreed that a man should not divorce his wife whilst she is menstruating? Why? Because when a woman is menstruating, her husband has no desire for her, and he might be averse to her; but the True Lord *the Most High* does not want the man to divorce his wife except when she is pure, and he has not yet had conjugal relations with her after she has

performed ritual ablutions after menstruation so that he does not divorce her except at the time when he has the strongest desire for her.

So, the True Lord *the Most High* wants the disputes between husband and wife to be part of the private married life so that they are protected by the shield of love, affection and mercy. But the involvement of other parties destroys this shield, whether the party is a father, mother, or brother.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...and do not keep them, intending harm, to transgress [against them]....’ That is, do not keep them, o men, in married life simply in order to abuse the woman and degrade her. The meaning of *dirar* (‘abuse’) is to do something which on the surface seems to be based on an intention to do good from you, but by which you really intend evil. This is why they call a mosque a ‘mosque of *dirar*’ if it was built seemingly as a place of prayer, when actually the intent behind it was to spread disbelief and dissension amongst the believers. That same is true of *dirar* in marriage; the man says ‘I do not want to divorce her, and I will take her home’, saying this whilst plotting to take her back in order to humiliate her and take vengeance on her. Islam does not allow this, but rather forbids it.

The True Lord *the Most High* warns against this kind of behaviour, saying, ‘...and do not keep them, intending harm, to transgress [against them]. And whoever does that has certainly wronged himself....’ Do not, then, suppose that when you harm your wife after taking her back, you are thereby wronging her; no; you are only wronging yourself because when you harm a person, you put God on his side, and if he supplicates against you, God will answer his supplication, and in this way you prevent yourself from attaining God’s pleasure; and is there any greater wrong than the wrong which will afflict you if God’s wrath falls upon you?

The True Lord *the Most High* then continues: ‘...And whoever does that has certainly wronged himself. And do not take the verses of God in jest....’ That is, take God’s method as a method which came to govern the motions of life without any trickery or flights of fancy; it is something realistic, and it is not right for anyone to take frivolously the methods which God *the Most High* has sent down to protect a human being’s life and dignity, whether it be a man or woman.

‘...And remember the favour of God upon you and what has been sent down to you of the Book and wisdom by which He admonishes you....’ Recalling God’s favour upon them, whilst speaking about divorce is meant to remind the believers of the state they were in before this legislation was revealed: what part did a woman play, in the pre-Islamic times of pagan ignorance, in the matters of marriage and divorce, and what was the difference in her situation after the Quran was revealed? Her rights became protected by the Quran.

The True Lord *the Most High* reminds the believers of this favour in order to draw their attention to the state they were in before Islam. The man would divorce his wife and then take her back, then divorce her and take her back, and do so even a thousand times, without any controls or regulations; and he would deny her conjugal relations for months at a time, leaving her to suffer the anguish of separation from him, unable to speak.

And when a woman’s husband died, she would disappear from society, never appearing again, and never coming out of her house, as though she carried an infectious disease. And above all this, a daughter was a source of shame to her father, and he would kill her before she reached adulthood under the pretence of protecting his honour and dignity.

In a nutshell, marriage was more of a joke than a serious matter; and then Islam came, and settled matters so, they were no longer chaotic, with no rules or laws. So remember, o believers, how God blessed you with Islam; and look at how He blessed you with a domestic system which the whole world from east to west is eager to imitate.

You were a nation with no civilisation and no culture, worshipping idols and fighting wars which you started against one another for the most trivial and base of reasons, and you were ignorant of reading and writing; and then God *the Most High* sent down to you this sublime, refined law, the like of which no other civilisation has attained up to this day. Will you not remember this blessing, which you enjoy by the grace of God? For this reason, He *the Exalted* said, ‘...And remember the favour of God upon you and what has been sent down to you of the Book and wisdom by which He admonishes you....’ The Book is the Quran, and the wisdom is the *Sunna* of the Messenger of

God *peace and blessings be upon him*. The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the noble verse by saying, ‘...And fear God and know that God has knowledge of all things.’

Beware of accusing your religion of having left out any law for your benefit; for every law is present and accounted for in Islam because God has full knowledge of the states of the people, and nothing that occurs in God’s universe could be beyond what God has ordained in His Book, for He *the Exalted* is the Creator of the universe, and the Revealer of the law.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَإِذَا طَلَقْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ فَلَمَّا بَلَغْنَ أَجَلَهُنَّ فَلَا تَعْضُلُوهُنَّ أَنْ يَنْكِحْنَ أَزْوَاجَهُنَّ
إِذَا تَرَاضَوْا بَيْنَهُمْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ يُوعَظُ بِهِ مَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ
وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ ۚ ذَٰلِكُمْ أَزْكَىٰ لَكُمْ وَأَطْهَرُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٣٢﴾

When you divorce women and they have reached their set time, do not prevent them from remarrying their husbands if they both agree to do so in a fair manner. Let those of you who believe in God and the Last Day take this to heart: that is more wholesome and purer for you. God knows and you do not [232] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 232)

The verse says, ‘...and they have fulfilled their waiting term....’ This means that their waiting-term has ended, and the husband has not yet used up all his pronouncements of divorce, yet he no longer has the right to take his wife back unless he makes a new contract and pays a new dowry. Imagine that the husband wants to take his wife back again, and certain relatives who are argumentative and disputatious may become involved in the matter, and try to stand in the way of the marriage being completed. The couple themselves might each want to reconcile with the other, and have an emotional and psychological connection of which no one else knows, but the family members who become involved in the dispute are opposed to things going back to normal, out of fear that there will be a repeat of what happened, or for other reasons. We say to these people: As long as the couple are content to go back, it is not right for anyone to stand in the way of their returning to how things were.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...do not prevent them....’ We know that to prevent is to hinder; and this is addressed to the relatives and those people concerned with the wellbeing of the couple who offer well-meaning advice; and ‘...from remarrying their [former] husbands...’ refers to the ones who had divorced them.

The meaning of this is: Do not prevent husbands from taking back the wives they divorced before; and the family members who refuse to allow their daughters to go back to their husbands should know that by continuing with this disputation, they are preventing the beneficial course of the gradual stages of divorce, which was ordained by the wisdom of God.

The wisdom of legislating that divorce takes place once and then, twice is that those who do not reconcile the first time might reconcile the second time; and since God well knows the souls of men, He legislated for them that they may pronounce divorce once or twice, and gave some time to those who made a mistake the first time so that they would not make a mistake the second time. For this reason, it is not right that anyone creates an obstacle to bar married life from starting anew.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...from remarrying their [former] husbands....’ Notice here that the True Lord *the Most High* ascribes marriage to women, saying ‘from remarrying’; and this shows that it is conditional that the woman agrees to returning to the marriage; for it cannot be that he divorces her first and then, she has no say in whether she returns to him or not.

Then, the verse continues: ‘...if they agree among themselves on an acceptable basis....’ That is, as long as they have agreed with each other, and they see that it is best to return to one another, the people of ill favour who wish to oppose the will of the two sides, should stay out of it, and leave that which is lawful to return to its course. ‘...That is instructed to whoever of you believes in God and the Last Day. That is better for you and purer....’ This is the decree of your Lord, and an admonition to you, O you who believe in God as an All-Wise Lord and Lawgiver, Who has full knowledge of the inclinations to good in the human soul.

The word ‘better’ alerts us to the unlawfulness of standing in the way of a woman who wants to return to her husband who divorced her and then, her

waiting-term finished, and who wants to marry her again. The True Lord *the Most High* tells us: Do not stand in the way of their wish to be reconciled, for any reason whatsoever. Why, o Lord?

The answer comes in the words of God *the Most High*: ‘...and God knows and you know not.’ Consider the beauty of the Quranic discourse, and how God’s words ‘...and God knows and you know not’ serve the meaning intended by the verses. God knows, and you do not know that for a married couple’s life to return to normal is more virtuous and cleaner.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَالْوَالِدَاتُ يُرْضِعْنَ أَوْلَدَهُنَّ حَوْلَيْنِ كَامِلَيْنِ ۖ لِمَنْ أَرَادَ أَنْ يُتِمَّ الرَّضَاعَةَ ۚ وَعَلَى الْمَوْلُودِ لَهُ
رِزْقُهُنَّ وَكِسْوَتُهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ ۚ لَا تُكَلَّفُ نَفْسٌ إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا ۚ لَا تُضَارَّ وَالِدَةٌ بِوَلَدِهَا وَلَا
مَوْلُودٌ لَهُ بِوَلَدِهِ ۚ وَعَلَى الْوَارِثِ مِثْلُ ذَلِكَ ۚ فَإِنْ أَرَادَا فِصَالًا عَنْ تَرَاضٍ مِنْهُمَا وَتَشَاوُرٍ
فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا ۚ وَإِنْ أَرَدْتُمْ أَنْ تَسْرِعُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذَا سَلَّمْتُمْ مَا
ءَاتَيْتُمْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۚ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٢٣٣﴾

Mothers suckle their children for two whole years, if they wish to complete the term, and clothing and maintenance must be borne by the father in a fair manner. No one should be burdened with more than they can bear: no mother shall be made to suffer harm on account of her child, nor any father on account of his. The same duty is incumbent on the father’s heir. If, by mutual consent and consultation, the couple wish to wean [the child], they will not be blamed, nor will there be any blame if you wish to engage a wet nurse, provided you pay as agreed in a fair manner. Be mindful of God, knowing that He sees everything you do [233] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 233)

Look at the greatness of Islam: here, the True Lord *the Most High* speaks about mothers nursing their children after divorce. Divorce creates dissension between a man and a woman, and the True Lord *the Most High* looks at the issue in the manner of the Dispenser of Mercy, and the All Knowing of His servants; He wants to protect the fruit of the marriage before the dissension

emerges between the parents, and therefore He tells us: Do not make your dissension, and your separation and your divorce, a source of misery for the innocent baby child.

These words refer to the divorced women who leave the household of their former husbands because God *the Most High* says after this, ‘...Upon the father is the mothers’ provision and their clothing according to what is acceptable....’ The verse speaks about ‘...the mothers’ provision and their clothing...’ and this means that the woman and her child are away from the husband because if she was still with him, the provision and clothing of the child would be taken care of. The True Lord *the Most High* here imposes a right for the nursing baby, and his mother would not have the right to take him if she were not nursing. Some people misunderstand this and think that the provision and clothing here are for the wives in general, to which we say: No; the provision and clothing are to be provided for the divorced women who are nursing only.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to make this right a given, so, He ordained the right of the baby to be provided with sustenance and clothing by his father so that this would be known to him at the time of divorce.

God *the Most High* says, ‘Mothers may breastfeed their children two complete years....’ We notice here that He did not use an imperative form here; He did not say: O mothers, nurse.... This is because a command is open to being obeyed or disobeyed; but God presented the matter using a statement of fact, as though this is a natural and real occurrence which is not contravened.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...Upon the father is the mothers’ provision and their clothing according to what is acceptable...’ Reflect on the greatness of the Quranic discourse in how God says, ‘...Upon the father...’ (the expression used in the verse means literally ‘to whom the child is born’) and not ‘Upon the father’; and He said, ‘to whom the child is born’ in order to charge the man with the responsibilities of providing sustenance and clothing because the responsibility of spending on a child rests with the father, not the mother; she carried him in her womb, gave birth to him, and nursed him, and the child is ascribed to the father in the end. A poet said:

People's mothers are nothing but vessels

Storage-places; sons belong to their fathers.

Since the child is ascribed to his father, the father must provide for him sustenance and clothing, and he must also provide sustenance and clothing for the mother who nurses him, in a fair and equitable manner which does not do an injustice and a wrong to the father by making him spend too much. The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...No person is charged with more than his capacity....' These words refer to the mother and father for it is not allowed for the divorced woman to demand from the baby's father more than he can bear, and she must suffice herself with a reasonable amount of spending.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says, '...No mother should be harmed through her child, and no father through his child....' The True Lord *the Most High* reminds the father that he is the one who has begotten the child, and he must not harm the mother of the child by refusing to spend on his child, and he must not leave her to ask others for her sustenance and clothing. At the same time, He reminds the mother: Do not make your baby a means of making his father suffer by demanding too much sustenance and clothing from him. He *the Exalted* gives us the specific framework which provides the infant with its rights; for there is a difference between a baby which enjoys the warmth of life with both his parents, and one whose parents are separated.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* gives us another cause to think, which is that the baby's father might die; and if the father dies, who will spend on the baby in the care of his divorced mother? Here the True Lord *the Most High* gives the answer with His decree: '...And upon the [father's] heir is [a duty] like that [of the father]....'

The True Lord *the Most High* affirms that the responsibility of spending falls on the heir of the baby's father. It is true that the baby itself will inherit from its father, but the care of the orphaned child is the responsibility of the one who inherits the custody, and has authority over the father's wealth if he dies. In this way, God *the Most High* ensures the right of the baby with the one who begot it, the father, if he is alive, and with the father's heir if he dies.

With this, God *the Most High* has legislated for the preservation of the way of life of the baby in the circumstance of the presence of its parents, and has also legislated for it in the event that its parents divorce and its father remains alive, and has also legislated for it in the event when its parents divorce and its father then dies. The True Lord *the Most High* then, says, ‘...And if they both desire weaning through mutual consent from both of them and consultation, there is no blame upon either of them....’ Look at the mercy of Islam: a man’s divorce from his wife does not mean that everything that was between them has ended so that the children are neglected and made to suffer by the divorce. God’s words ‘...through mutual consent from both of them and consultation...’ indicate that there is still something shared by the two sides, which is related to the care of the children; and in this thing which is shared, the rights of the children to motherly affection and fatherly affection, must be observed so that the child will grow up without being deprived of the care of either mother, or father, even if they differed and are divorced.

They must meet with counsel and mutual consent in the matter of raising their children so that the children feel the affection of both parents, and grow up without any psychological pains, and understand that their mother values their wellbeing, as does their father; though there may be dissention and differences between them, they agree on what is best for the children with mutual consent and counsel.

The neglect of children that we witness in many cases of divorce is a very serious matter because it leaves deep negative effects and traces on the children’s souls, and leads to their misery and perhaps instability in their lives. What is the sin of children for whom adults were the direct cause of their coming into this life? Is it not better that their parents should provide them with psychological and living conditions which will assure for them a dignified upbringing? The way of God is in front of us, so, why do we not follow it so that through it, we can find happiness for ourselves and for the coming generations?

At the beginning of the verse, the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘Mothers may breastfeed their children two complete years....’ But what will the case

be if things come up which make the period of nursing shorter than two years, or special circumstances make the period of nursing longer than two years? Here, the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...And if they both desire weaning through mutual consent from both of them and consultation, there is no blame upon either of them....’

He *the Exalted* shows us that separation, i.e. weaning, must take place after mutual consent and consultation between the parents, and they will thereby incur no sin. The True Lord *the Most High* then says, ‘...And if you wish to have your children nursed by a substitute, there is no blame upon you as long as you give payment according to what is acceptable....’ The meaning of ‘to have your children nursed by a substitute...’ is to bring a wet-nurse to the infant; and if you wish to do this, there is no harm in it.

When a divorced man gives the mother her child to nurse, the infant enjoys the affection of the mother which she naturally possesses. But suppose that the mother is unable to nurse, or that her circumstances do not allow her to nurse because of a weakness in her health or her strength. In this case, the father is required to bring his child a wet-nurse, and this wet-nurse, who nurses the infant, needs for the father to give her that which will pay tribute to her and ensure that she accepts to nurse the child in safety, and watch over him faithfully.

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes this noble verse by saying, ‘...And fear God and know that God sees what you do.’ The True Lord *the Most High* warns against anyone’s taking His rulings and claiming openly to be applying them whilst being indifferent to the spirit of these rulings. An example of this is the father who wants to dupe society so that, when he sees the wet-nurse of his child in public, he claims that he is spending on her, and giving her wages to her in full, greeting her with friendliness and kindness whilst the reality of the situation is contrary to this. God *the Most High* warns those who do this: You are not dealing with society, you are dealing with God, and ‘...God sees what you do.’

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَالَّذِينَ يُتَوَفَّوْنَ مِنْكُمْ وَيَذَرُونَ أَزْوَاجًا يَتَرَبَّصْنَ بِأَنْفُسِهِنَّ أَرْبَعَةَ أَشْهُرٍ وَعَشْرًا ۖ فَإِذَا بَلَغْنَ أَجَلَهُنَّ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي مَا فَعَلْنَ فِي أَنْفُسِهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ﴿٢٣٤﴾

If any of you die and leave widows, the widows should wait for four months and ten nights before remarrying. When they have completed this set time, you will not be blamed for anything they may reasonably choose to do with themselves. God is fully aware of what you do [234] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 234)

As we know, the waiting-term is the period of time which God ordained after marriage finishes, either by divorce, or by the death of the husband. The waiting-term takes place either upon divorce or after the death of the husband. If it is after divorce, the waiting-term is three *quru'*, which we said means either menstruation or the period of purity between menstruations; and if the divorced woman is too young to have begun menstruating, or old enough to have undergone the menopause, the waiting-term changes from being based on menses to being based on months, namely three months (*at-Talaq*: 4).

We know that it is the right of the husband to take back his wife at his own decision without the intervention of the wife or her guardian, as long as the waiting-period after a revocable divorce is still ongoing; and once her waiting-term ends, his right to take his wife back of his own volition ends, and he can only take her back with a new marriage contract and a new dowry, and as long as he still has the right to do this, i.e. he has not used up all his pronouncements of divorce.

We said that if there are two pronouncements of divorce and then a third is pronounced, the woman must marry another man in the normal way, not with an intention to make her lawful once more for her first husband. As for the waiting-term of the woman whose husband dies, we know that the Quran states that she must wait for four months and ten days. This is the case if she is not pregnant, but if she is pregnant, she must wait for whichever is further-off: if the waiting-term of four months and ten days is further-off, she must wait this long, and if the furthest-off date is the conclusion of her pregnancy, she must wait that long. But is it not possible that her husband might die during the ninth month of her pregnancy so that she gives birth before he is even buried?

Does this mean that her waiting-term is over? No, it ends with the furthest-off of the two terms, which in this case is the passing of four months and ten days, although some of the jurists say that the waiting-period of any pregnant woman ends when she gives birth

But if her husband has not died, her waiting-period ends when she gives birth, and she is free to marry after that if she chooses, even a single moment after. Some people explain the wisdom of making the waiting-period of a woman whose husband has died four months and ten days, saying: It is because if she is pregnant with a boy, her pregnancy will become known to her when he moves after three months, whilst if it is a girl it will become known to her when she moves after four months, and we give her ten extra nights to be sure.

We say to them: May God *the Most High* reward you for your explanation; but the purpose of the waiting-period here is not to make sure she is not pregnant; for if it was, the woman's waiting-term would end when she gave birth; and if the purpose of it was to see whether she is pregnant or not, her waiting-period would be three menstrual cycles if she has one, or else three months if she does not have one because of her youth or old age. But God specified that she wait four months and ten days out of loyalty to her husband's right, and in honour of their married life.

So, God *the Most High* made the woman whose husband dies wait the longest period a woman can endure; and when a woman's husband dies, she should not leave her house, beautify herself, or meet stranger men, out of loyalty to her husband. Once her waiting-term is over, i.e. four months and ten days, '...then there is no blame upon you for what they do with themselves....' This means that she can beautify herself in her house and then, go out without revealing her beauty, and if someone wishes to propose marriage to her, they may. When God *the Most High* says, 'four months and ten,' it means four months and ten days/nights.

Here there is a matter of faith and law which shows how every legal ruling affects all those who are morally responsible, even if the ruling does not directly concern them. The woman whose husband dies, waits for four months and ten days, and during this waiting-period, God decreed that she

should not beautify herself, wear make-up, or leave her house, out of loyalty to her husband's right; and once she reaches the end of this waiting-term, He says, '...then there is no blame upon you for what they do with themselves in an acceptable manner....' He did not say: There shall be no blame upon them.

God *the Most High* addresses these words to men because every believing man has some form of guardianship over every believing woman, and if he sees something in her behaviour, or the way she takes care of herself which contravenes the rulings of the waiting-term, he has the right to intervene. For example, if he sees her beautifying herself, he says to her or sends someone to say to her, 'Why are you beautifying yourself?' God's words 'there is no blame upon you' make men guardians over the woman whose husband dies, so, they should not say, 'We have no right to intervene here;' for the ruling of faith is a ruling which affects every believer and governs every believer. The True Lord *the Most High* describes the believers as those who enjoin upon one another the keeping to truth, and enjoin upon one patience in adversity (*al-'Asr*: 3).

God's words 'enjoin upon one another' do not mean that one group of people have been singled out with the role of enjoining others, whilst another group of people are only to be enjoined by others; rather, each one of us enjoins at some times, and is enjoined by others at other times; this is the meaning of 'enjoin upon one another.'

So, if you see weakness in someone else concerning any aspect of God's rulings, you can enjoin him; and likewise, if someone else sees a weakness in you concerning any aspect of God's rulings, he can enjoin you. When we all enjoin one another, no believer amongst us will be guilty of any open sin. So, the verse does not single out one group for counsel apart from others, but rather, everyone gives counsel to everyone else because human vicissitudes come in turns to all people. When I am weak, you watch over me and counsel me; and when you are weak, I watch over you and counsel you. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...there shall be no blame upon you....' He *the Exalted* did not direct these words to women only, but rather to all believers; and He did not address only the family guardians of the women, but rather, He left the ruling

for all the community so that no one can say, 'I have nothing to do with this woman whose husband has died, and she can do as she pleases.' She can beautify herself according to Islamic standards, and adorn herself according to the boundaries which God has set for her in this regard.

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes this verse by saying, '...And God is Cognisant of what you do.' That is, God is aware of what is in her soul, or her intention. Suppose that she does something illegal without anyone seeing – she should not think that just because others did not witness this act, the matter is over; no; God *the Most High* is aware of what she does, even if no one else sees her.

The True Lord *the Most High*, by all the aforementioned laws, protected the right of the husband until the waiting-term ends, and the right of the woman whose husband dies during the waiting-term, and also protected, with all these laws, the honour of the woman, making the woman inviolable so that no one can come near her to tear her veil. She has a waiting-term in which she is ascribed to another man, so no one can approach her at this time. Why? Because the woman, especially if she has been divorced, might be taken by an urge to seek vengeance for herself and her honour, and she might remarry in haste; and the issues of separation or difference might have been the result of the insinuations of another man who desires her so that as soon as she is divorced and begins the waiting-term, those who desire her swarm around her, or she might herself look to one whom she believes is right for her to marry. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* stipulates a period of time, and makes the waiting-term like a forbidden zone to give the woman protection which is actual, not superficial.

Because this legislation is from a Merciful God, it does not disregard human emotions, neither those of the one who wishes to marry, nor of the woman who seeks someone to marry her. He handles this matter with precision, discretion and judiciousness, saying:

وَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِيمَا عَرَّضْتُمْ بِهِ مِنْ خِطْبَةِ النِّسَاءِ أَوْ أَكْنَنْتُمْ فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ عَلِيمٌ
 اللَّهُ أَنْتُمْ سَتَدْرُوْنَهُنَّ وَلَكِنْ لَا تُوَاعِدُوهُنَّ سِرًّا إِلَّا أَنْ تَقُولُوا قَوْلًا مَعْرُوفًا وَلَا
 تَعْزِمُوا عَقْدَةَ الزَّكَاحِ حَتَّى يَبْلُغَ الْكِتَابُ أَجَلَهُ، وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي
 أَنْفُسِكُمْ فَاحْذَرُوهُ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ حَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٣٥﴾

You will not be blamed whether you give a hint that you wish to marry these women, or keep it to yourselves. God knows that you intend to propose to them. Do not make a secret arrangement with them; speak to them honorably and do not confirm the marriage tie until the prescribed period reaches its end. Remember that God knows what is in your souls, so be mindful of Him. Remember that God is most forgiving and forbearing [235] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 235)

The verb ('arrada) (to 'allude') comes from the Arabic word (*ta'rid*), which means to indicate something without a direct statement, but rather with an intimation.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to give emotions a way to be vented in this regard; and venting does not mean simply to express one's emotions, but rather, it is to ensure what is most beneficial. It is possible that if He had forbidden hinting, this might cause the woman's chance of marriage to be squandered, or it might have caused those who wished to marry her to miss their chance. For this reason, the True Lord *the Most High* ordained rules which obliged the man and woman both to observe the manners of caution, as though He were saying to us: I forbid you from proposing marriage during the waiting-term, or making any plain statements during it; but there is no prohibition of making hints from afar.

For example, the man might praise the woman, and enumerate her virtues in a way which does not contravene the etiquettes of Islam. This kind of speech is a hint and intimation, and the benefit of it is that it expresses what is in the soul of the speaker to the divorced woman, so, she knows his opinion of her. Were he not to say this, someone else might beat him to her and deprive him of the chance to act out what is in his soul, and prevent him from coming forward to propose to her once the waiting-term is ended. This might incite him to think of something else, and express himself in an incorrect manner.

So, alluding has a benefit in that it lets the divorced woman know what so-and-so thinks of her so that if someone else comes to her, she can reject him right away. In this way, we see a part of the mercy of the True Lord *the Most High* with us, in that He made the waiting-term like a forbidden zone to protect the woman, and made alluding a chance to express emotions which can establish a beneficial situation thereafter. The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'There is no blame upon you for that to which you [indirectly] allude concerning a proposal to women....' The Arabic word for proposal or marriage-offer (*khitba*: engagement) is made up of the root letters *kh-t-b*, which indicate things which are shared by several concepts: there is *khutba* ('sermon' or 'speech'), *khatb* ('something momentous'), and there is the meaning which we are currently concerned with, which is *khitba* ('marriage-offer'). All of these concepts indicate that something momentous is being dealt with, for the word (*khatb*) means something momentous which has a strong impact, and an orator only gives a speech (*khutba*: sermon) on something which is very important, giving advice to society about something vital.

Likewise, a marriage-offer is a momentous thing because it is a dividing line between two lives: a life with no restrictions and a life restricted by a family and order. All of these words share in the meaning of a very important matter, a crucial matter. He *the Exalted* says, 'There is no blame upon you for that to which you [indirectly] allude concerning a proposal to women or for what you conceal within yourselves....' That is, you will incur no blame if you keep something in your soul of which the woman is unaware. The Muslim conceals and keeps in his soul whatever he likes; but what will let the divorced woman know that she is on your mind if you keep your feelings about her to yourself? You must intimate and hint in a way which is respectful to the woman.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...God knows that you will have them in mind....' The One Who created you knows that as long as she is on your mind, and her husband has died or divorced her, she has become a hope for you; and if He had restrained you, He would have impeded your emotions, and you would lose out on the opportunity to take her as your wife thereafter. For this reason, the True Lord *the Most High* permitted alluding so that no one would fall into a forbidden matter, namely: '...But do not promise them

secretly...' by taking a pledge from them that they will not marry anyone but you, by saying to them, 'Marry me.' Rather, the man must hint, and not be plain and straight. Secret proposals are forbidden, but it is permitted to allude with proper manners: '...except for saying a proper saying...' by saying, for example, 'If someone had a wife like you, he would be so happy,' or compliments like that which normally please the woman. We all know that a woman who has been divorced or has lost her husband, possesses lucidity and brightness with which she can pick up the meaning and intention of words.

The True Lord *the Most High* continues: '...And do not resolve to undertake a marriage contract until the decreed period reaches its end....' In this way we see that even to resolve on marriage is forbidden. Resolution comes before action, so, if it is forbidden, this makes the unlawfulness of the action itself even stronger and more strictly forbidden. You may intend to marry her and place your trust in God, but do not make it a settled matter until her waiting-term is finished. Once the decreed period has come to its end and her waiting-term is over, resolve on tying the marriage-knot. It is as though the marriage contract passes through three stages: The first stage is that a hint and an allusion is made; the second stage is that marriage is resolved upon, which is not right or proper to take place until after the waiting-term ends; and the third stage is the accomplishment of the marriage contract.

The purpose of these stages is to allow each side to take their time to think deeply over this serious matter; if this thinking leads to resolution, one can go ahead with the marriage after the waiting-term ends; and if this thinking leads to abstention and the dismissal of this notion, then one is free to do as one pleases.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants these stages to give a chance to turn back if one party discovers something about the other which displeases them. All of these steps show us that the marriage contract should not be accomplished without resolve, and there should be no contract without resolve. The True Lord *the Most High* wants the Muslim not to tie the marriage-knot without firm resolve; and resolve means determination that you want to marry and are prepared to live up to the rights and responsibilities of marriage, and to pay the full marriage dowry, and to keep to it lawfully and chastely; for marriage which is not based on resolve is doomed to fail. The meaning of resolve is

that you think about the matter deeply and thoughtfully in your soul so that you settle on a sure decision; after this, you can begin marriage on the basis that it will be permanent and lasting, not just an ephemeral passion which is not based on the resolve of the soul.

This is why marriage, which is not based on deliberation, but which rather hangs on ephemeral motivations such as the satiation of passion, does not last, or succeed. An instance of this is 'temporary marriage' (*zawaj al-mut'a*): the reason temporary marriage was made unlawful is that the one who does it, does not want to continue in married life; and as long as he does not intend marriage to be permanent, this means that his intent is only ephemeral pleasure.

Those who seek to allow temporary marriage are flawed in their thinking because they ignore the element of approaching marriage with permanence in their minds. Why do you need to confine your marriage to a limited time? True marriage cannot be confined in this way. Reflect on the foolishness of these people, and you will see that it is not a case of marriage, but rather, a way to excuse fornication; if not, then why does he make it a condition of temporary marriage that he only marry her for a month, or more?

When a person specifies the limitation of the marriage to a certain period of time, this shows the foolishness of his thinking, and his bad intention because true marriage is that which one enters with the intention of permanency. He might end it after only an hour if he sees that this is necessary, and no one would object to this; so, why restrict yourself to a given period of time? The one who enters a temporary marriage, uses his reason in the wrong way; he might be intelligent in one aspect, but he is injudicious in another.

One must enter marriage with resolve after thinking deeply and carefully, and then tie the knot based on this thinking. Beware of harbouring in your soul this kind of marriage linked to desires and goals in your soul such as the lack of permanency or the goal of pleasure alone; for all of these lustful and worldly desires which some people think of, are ephemeral desires, so, abolish from your heart all of these notions; for if you seek something from marriage other than permanence and chastity, God *the Most High* will know it, and He will cause your thinking to bring misery to you, so, beware of this.

God *the Most High* does not warn someone against doing anything unless it would incur His wrath, and for this reason the True Lord *the Most High* concludes this noble verse by saying, ‘...And know that God knows what is within yourselves, so, beware of Him. And know that God is Forgiving and Forbearing.’ He *the Exalted* knows the weakness of the human soul, and that it might weaken sometimes; and if it does some unfavourable thing, God gives the person the chance to repent, for He is Much-Forgiving and Forbearing.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

لَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِنْ طَلَقْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ مَا لَمْ تَمْسُوهُنَّ أَوْ تَفْرِضُوا لَهُنَّ فَرِيضَةً وَمَتَّعُوهُنَّ
عَلَى الْمَوْسِعِ قَدْرُهُ وَعَلَى الْمَقْتَرِ قَدْرُهُ مَتَّعًا بِالْمَعْرُوفِ حَقًّا عَلَى الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٣٣﴾

You will not be blamed if you divorce women when you have not yet consummated the marriage or fixed a bride-gift for them, but make fair provision for them, the rich according to his means and the poor according to his – this is a duty for those who do good [236] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 236)

We notice here that the discussion in the previous verses was about divorces of consummated marriages, or the consummated marriage which ended with the husband’s death, leaving the wife behind. But certain things might occur which make it necessary to divorce a woman before consummating the marriage, and this verse refers to the wife being divorced in an unconsummated marriage, and in this kind of situation we may have two cases: the first is where a dowry has been specified in the contract, and the second is where the dowry has not been specified. This implies that the specifying of a dowry, is not a necessary condition of marriage contract, but rather, if the woman marries the man and no dowry has been stipulated for this marriage, adequate dowry (of the likes of the woman in her community) is considered to have been agreed upon, and the contract is valid. The proof of this is that God *the Most High* says, ‘There is no blame upon you if you divorce women while you have not touched them nor specified for them an obligation (dowry)...’ This means that she was considered a wife, although the marriage had not been consummated.

We can ask here: what does 'touched' (*mass*) mean? In Arabic, we have the words *mass*, *lams*, and *mulamasa*, all meaning different degrees of touching. A person might touch (*mass*) something without being affected by what he has touched so that, he does not notice its nature, or whether it is hard or soft, or hot or cold, and so on. As for the word *lams*, the thing which is touched must be felt; and as for *mulamasa*, it means that there is interaction between the person who touches and the thing being touched. So we have three levels: the first is *mass*, the second is *lams*, and the third is *mulamasa*. The word *mass* in this verse means sexual contact and intercourse, and it is a lighter expression than the word *lams*, and subtler than saying 'contact' (*mulamasa*) or 'coition' (*mubashara*). We know that it means this because there is a Quranic expression elsewhere which clearly shows this meaning, and from the usage of the word *mass* in that context, we can have a better understanding of its meaning in this verse we are currently examining. The Lady Mary *peace be upon her*, given the glad tidings that she would be given her blessed son, wondered how she can have a son when no man has ever touched her, and never has she been a loose woman (*Maryam*: 20).

The Noble Quran clarifies, on the tongue of our Lady Mary *peace be upon her* that no man has ever had the connection with her from which a child could have been produced; and the expression is of the utmost precision. And because it involved the exposing of confidential and secret matters, the Quran used the lightest word (in a decent euphemistic expression) to describe this thing, namely touch (*mass*). It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* wants to confirm her chastity even in her use of words, so, He negated that any man had even touched her, never mind had any kind of conjugal relations with her, although the meaning of the word in this context is indeed conjugal relations, since the verse is meant to affirm Mary's chastity.

Let us reflect on the decorum and propriety of the Quranic expression in dealing with the matter in the verse which we are currently examining. It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* is using the word to express the limit of its meaning, with the lightest kind of expression.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...nor specified for them an obligation (dowry)...'. We know that when the Arabic word *aw* (meaning 'or' or 'nor')

is used between two things, it means ‘either this or that.’ Is a dowry settled upon them in return for touching them? The direct contrast of ‘...while you have not touched them...’ is that you have touched them and the contrast of ‘...specified for them an obligation (dowry)...’ is that you have not specified a dowry for them. It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* is saying: You are not to blame by divorcing, while you have not yet touched them, whether you have settled a dowry for them or not. In this way, the Quranic style is intent on alerting the mind to note its meanings.

We can observe that the True Lord *the Most High* uses the word ‘if’ to refer to the possibility of divorce, and as we know the word ‘if’ refers to doubtful matters. It is as though God *the Most High* does not want divorce to actually take place, which is why He did not use the word ‘when’, but rather placed the matter in a doubtful position so that the verse corroborated what the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘The most hateful thing to God of all He has made lawful is divorce.’⁽¹⁾

The True Lord *the Most High* says after this, ‘...But make provision for them – the wealthy according to his capability and the poor according to his capability....’ That is, if you divorce your wife before consummating the marriage, and you had not specified any dowry for her, give her provision. Scholars say that the value of this provision is that which is equivalent to half of the dowry which a woman of similar status would receive because it was assumed that she would take half the dower, and as long as no dower was specified for her, she is entitled to half the dower of a woman of her status. The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...the wealthy according to his capability and the poor according to his capability....’ That is, the provision should be within the limits of the husband’s capabilities: the affluent wealthy man must give that which reflects what God has granted him, and the poor man must give according to his ability.

The Quran’s word here ‘wealthy’ (*musi* ‘) is derived from the verb *awsa* ‘a, which means ‘to enrich.’ The active participle of this verb (i.e. ‘the one who enriches’) is *musi* ‘, and the passive participle (i.e. ‘the one who is enriched’) is *musa* ‘ *alayh*. Which of these words best describes the husband? If we

(1) Narrated by Abu Dawud, Al-Bayhaqi, and Al-Hakim on the authority of Ibn ‘Umar

consider that his provisions have come from the True Lord *the Most High*, he is 'the one who is enriched,' whilst if we consider that the True Lord *the Most High* requires you to broaden (Arabic *awsa'a*) your life's work so that your provision will come to you, and God will enrich you according to how much you broaden it, he is thereby 'the one who enriches.'

So, the 'wealthy' person is the one who enriches himself by broadening his means of work in this life; and to be impoverished (*iqtar*) means to be lacking, and provision will be given according to work, and to scanty circumstances. When the True Lord *the Most High* imposes a ruling of moral responsibility, He does not intend the ruling to be carried out by those from whom it is required alone, but rather, He spreads the responsibility throughout the faithful population. So His words '...the wealthy according to his capability and the poor according to his capability...' mean that if there is someone who does not carry out God's ruling, you must all come together to carry out God's command that everyone who divorces his wife before consummating the marriage must provide for her. The fact that the imperative verb in Arabic 'make provision for them' is addressed to a plural, shows that the whole community must come together to obey God's command. After this, He *the Exalted* says:

وَأِنْ طَلَقْتُمُوهُنَّ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ تَمْسُوهُنَّ وَقَدْ فَرَضْتُمْ لَهُنَّ فَرِيضَةً فَنِصْفُ مَا
فَرَضْتُمْ إِلَّا أَنْ يَعْفُوَ أَوْ يَعْفُوا الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ عُقْدَةُ النِّكَاحِ وَأَنْ تَعْفُوا
أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَى وَلَا تَنْسُوا الْفَضْلَ بَيْنَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٢٣٧﴾

If you divorce wives before consummating the marriage but after fixing a bride-gift for them, then give them half of what you had previously fixed, unless they waive [their right], or unless the one who holds the marriage tie waives [his right]. Waiving [your right] is nearer to godliness, so do not forget to be generous towards one another: God sees what you do [237]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 237)

That is, as long as he has not consummated the marriage with her, she does not take the whole dowry, but rather, she is entitled to half. We know that there is a difference between a ruling being based on the law of justice,

and a ruling giving consideration to the side of grace, and I will tell a true story from which we can learn:

Two people went to a man to ask him to arbitrate between them, and said: ‘Judge between us with justice.’ He said, ‘Would you like me to judge between you with justice, or with that which is better than justice?’ They said, ‘Is there anything better than justice?’ He said, ‘Yes: grace.’

Justice gives everyone their right, but grace makes a person give up his right, or some of it. So when the law establishes the scales of justice, it does not want to prevent the font of faith from giving forth the munificence of grace. He gives you justice, but He *the Exalted* says after this, ‘...And do not forget graciousness between you...’ Justice alone might be hard, and may cause hatred to remain in souls; but the act of grace brings an end to dispute, enmity and hatred.

Disputation only comes when I believe I am in the right, and you believe that you are in the right; and it might be that certain circumstances come to make my understanding seem good to me, and other circumstances come to you to make your own understanding seem good to you. When we hold fast to the matter of justice, we will not reach the point of contentment for human souls; but if we open to grace, we will be content, and put an end to the matter.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘And if you divorce them before you have touched them...’ that is, before you consummate the marriage, ‘...and you have already specified for them an obligation (dowry)...,’ meaning that you have stipulated the dowry, ‘...then [give] half of what you specified – unless they forego the right...’ meaning that the divorced woman forgoes her claim.

Some ignorant people say – and we seek refuge in God from ignorance – that the Quran has a grammatical mistake in it, thinking that the verb here for ‘they forgo’ should take the form of *ya ‘fu* instead of *ya ‘funa*. This is a kind of ignorance which does not differentiate between the letter *u* as part of the root form of a verb and the letter *u* as a masculine plural verb suffix. Here, the *u* is part of the verb, since the Arabic word for ‘forgo’ is *‘afa*, which in the imperfect tense is *ya ‘fu*.

From this, we understand that the wife may forgo half of her dowry and leave it for her husband. The True Lord *the Most High* then, says, ‘...or the one

in whose hand is the marriage contract foregoes it....' This means the husband, not the wife's guardian because the context of the verse indicates that it is the husband who is meant, although some exegetes say it means the wife's guardian. We should be aware that the wife's guardian does not have the right to forgo the woman's dowry because the dowry is the right of the wife, as it is a source of wealth and provision in people's lives and it is the counterpart to the man's sexual enjoyment of his wife. This is why you find that some people do not give their wives any dowry, saving it for her so that if someone is ill, she will buy medicine for him from this dowry even a single pill of aspirin because it is medicine bought with lawfully-earned provision, so God might place a cure in it. The woman saves her lawful dowry for these kinds of occasions so that she can do something with it in which God will place goodness because it is from a lawful source of provision, unadulterated by cheating or fraud.

To those exegetes who say that the wife's guardian is the one who is entitled to forgo the dowry, I reply: Why would God bring a ruling in which the woman can give up her right and forgo her half-dowry, whilst the man cannot be generous by forgoing the half? Why would Heaven place all the loss on the woman? It is logical for women, or the ones who have the marriage contract in their hands, i.e. their guardians, to forgo their right so that this forgoing comes only from the wives or their guardians, i.e. from only one side.

We should understand well the concept of grace of which God *the Most High* says, '...And do not forget graciousness between you....' The correspondence of forgoing is between the two of them, the man and the woman, and from here we understand that the words '...or the one in whose hand is the marriage contract foregoes it...' refer to the husband. Just as the wife may forgo half of her dowry to which she is entitled, the husband may also forgo half of the dowry to which he is entitled.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...And to forego it is nearer to righteousness...' because it is very possible that one of the two parties might think himself to be wronged even if he takes the half to which he is entitled; but if he does not take anything, this is closer to righteousness, and better for the soul.

In these kinds of situations, we must always remember the words of the True Lord *the Most High*: ‘...And do not forget graciousness between you....’ Even in situations of differences which lead to the husband leaving his wife before consummating the marriage, God *the Most High* says, ‘...And do not forget graciousness between you...’ that is, do not turn it into enmity, vengeance and acrimony, and know that the True Lord *the Most High* destines some things to bring about certain fated things of which we were not aware, and this should make one aware that his means are not the only things which act in life.

For example: a man may be pleased with a woman he sees, and he marries her; or a man might see a woman whom he does not like, but then someone else comes and is attracted to her. This means that God *the Most High* destined acceptance between the two of them when she saw that the man was right for her and he saw that she was right for him. For this reason, in the past, villagers used to say: Do not be sad when someone comes to seek your daughter’s hand in marriage, but then finds that he does not like her because it is written on the forehead of every girl: ‘O men, keep off other men’s women!’ She is not for him, which is why this man is not destined for her. We should not ignore the influence of fate in these matters because it is more conducive to protecting the human soul from bearing resentment and grudges. The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by saying, ‘...Indeed God, of whatever you do, is Seeing.’ He knows what is in the hearts, and the intention behind every action.

After this comes a verse that affirms a matter of faith, which is that all of the moral responsibilities of Islam are integral parts of a single body of teachings so that one cannot be separated from any other. Do not say, ‘This is an obligation of worship,’ and ‘This is a principle of benefit,’ and ‘This is a penal matter;’ no, everything which the True Lord *the Most High* commands is a matter of faith which, with others, makes up a complete and integral way.

So, after speaking about divorce, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

حَفِظُوا عَلَى الصَّلَوَاتِ وَالصَّلَاةِ الْوُسْطَى وَقُومُوا لِلَّهِ قَانِتِينَ ﴿٢٣٨﴾
 فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ فَرِجَالًا أَوْ رُكْبَانًا فَإِذَا أَمِنْتُمْ فَأَذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ كَمَا
 عَلَّمَكُمْ مَا لَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٣٩﴾

Take care to do your prayers, praying in the best way, and stand before God in devotion [238] If you are in danger, pray when you are out walking or riding; when you are safe again, remember God, for He has taught you what you did not know [239] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 238-239)

What should be noticed is that God *the Most High* will be returning to the matter of the family, and in particular to the widowed woman, in the next verse, saying, ‘And those who are taken in death among you and leave wives behind – for their wives is a bequest: maintenance for one year without turning [them] out [of the dead husband’s home]. But if they leave [of their own accord], then there is no blame upon you for what they do with themselves in an acceptable way. And God is Exalted in Might, Wise’ (*al-Baqara*: 240).

So, with the verse that begins with ‘Maintain with care the [obligatory] prayers...’ the True Lord *the Most High* divided a single issue, namely the separation of a husband and wife, and split it into two parts, and placed between them talking about prayer. This was to remind us of the oneness of the responsibilities of faith; and since the True Lord *the Most High* is speaking here about things which either mean voluntary separation by divorce or inescapable separation by death, God *the Most High* wanted to place man in an act of worship which connects him to God Who placed the rulings for divorce and prayer, and destined death.

Why did God *the Most High* choose prayer, and not any other act of worship, to interrupt the flow of the discourse about the rulings concerning divorce and separation? It is because prayer is what gives the believers tranquillity if the affairs of marriage and divorce have become serious and worrisome for them either because of the voluntary separation of the divorces which have occurred, or the pain of separation through death. Nothing will strengthen their hearts except for them to stand in prayer before their Lord; and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* would be the first to do that: when something became

wearisome for him, he would rise to pray. The believer goes to the Creator Who granted him the means of marriage and decreed divorce and separation, to ask Him to lighten the worry and sadness he suffers. Since the believer has elected to go to the One Who decrees all fate, he should know that God Who has sent these decrees of fate upon him, did not leave them without any rulings to manage them, but rather, He made for every situation, an appropriate ruling. The believer has nothing more to do than to accept the turns of fate with contentment, and then, go to God in penitence, humility and prayer; for divorce and death bring shock, and separation which is either voluntary, or else decreed by death.

God *the Most High* then says, ‘Maintain with care the [obligatory] prayers and [in particular] the middle prayer....’ We can therefore understand that the prayers referred to in the verse are the five daily prayers; so, what is the middle prayer? The admonition here contains what we call a specification and a generalisation. To have a better understanding of the issue let us have a closer look at God’s mentioning of the supplication of Noah *peace be upon him* when he prayed to his Lord to grant forgiveness to him, to his parents, to everyone who enters his house as a believer, and to all believing men and believing women; and to grant that the doers of evil shall increasingly meet with destruction (*Nuh*: 28).

How many times are the mother and father included here? They are included and mentioned specifically in His praying to God to grant forgiveness to him and to his parents, and then, (but without specification) in his words: to everyone who enters his house, and then, in his words: to all believing men and believing women; that is, they are included three times. So, invoking of a general thing after a specific thing means that the specific will be included in the general, and there will be repetition with respect to the specific according to its level of specificity.

God’s words ‘Maintain with care the [obligatory] prayers and [in particular] the middle prayer...’ imply the same thing. If we ask what the command ‘Maintain’ (*Hafizhu*) means, the answer requires that we understand that the word *hifzh* may mean ‘to memorise’ i.e. the opposite of ‘to forget’, and may also have another meaning which is ‘to save/keep’, i.e. the opposite of ‘to waste/lose’; and the two meanings are related because the one who remembers something and then forgets it has thereby lost it, whilst the one who saves money and then squanders it, has

also lost it. So these meanings are all related to the concept of losing something, and *hifzh* means to assure the continuation of something which is in your possession. If you memorise a verse of the Quran, you must save it within yourself; and if God blesses you with wealth, you must look after it.

His words 'Maintain with care the [obligatory] prayers...' mean, do not waste them; it could also mean something else, which is that you have tasted the sweetness of prayer in the closeness of your Lord's company, and it behoves you to hold onto this; and these words refer to the five-daily prayers with which we are familiar.

His words '...and [in particular] the middle prayer...' mention the specific after the general, as though God commanded us twice to be mindful of this specific: once included in the general, and once again in making specific mention of it. What is the reason for singling out the middle prayer specifically? The word 'middle' in Arabic (*wusta*) is the feminine form of *awsat*, and they both mean something which lies equidistantly between two things, that is, the two sides are equal. The two sides could not be equal in number – with regard to the five prayers – unless the prayers were of an odd number; for if they were of an even number, we would not be able to identify the middle one. As long as the meaning here is the middle one out of five, this means it is the third prayer, which is preceded by two prayers and followed by two more. This is the case if you consider the number, according to the order of first, second, third, fourth, and fifth.

If consideration is given to the obligation of the prayer, the first prayer which God *the Most High* made obligatory was the *zhuhr* (midday prayer); this was the first prayer to be prescribed, then came the '*asr* (mid-afternoon) prayer, then the *maghrib* (sunset) prayer, then the '*isha* (night) prayer, then the *fajr* (dawn) prayer. If you take the middle prayer according to the order of being prescribed, this would be the sunset prayer, and this is the opinion of many scholars.

If we consider the middle prayer according to the number of cycles of bowing (*rak'a*) within each prayer, we find that there is a prayer which has two cycles, namely the dawn prayer, and prayers which have four cycles, namely the midday, mid-afternoon, and night prayers, and a prayer with three cycles, namely the sunset prayer. The middle one of these is the prayer with three cycles,

lying as it does it between two and four, which again is the sunset prayer. If you consider it according to the passage of day, the dawn prayer is first, then the midday, mid-afternoon, sunset, and night prayers follow, this makes the mid-afternoon prayer the middle one.

If you consider it as the midpoint between the silent and loud prayers, it could be the dawn or the sunset prayers, as the silent prayers are the midday and mid-afternoon, and the loud prayers are the sunset, night, and dawn; between night and midday comes the dawn prayer, or it could be the sunset prayer since it comes between the midday and mid-afternoon prayers on one side, and the night and dawn prayers on the other.

If we consider it according to the times when the angels gather, it is at the ends of the day at night, and so is either the mid-afternoon or the dawn prayer. So the middle position comes from whatever point of view you take, whether it is based on number, or order of prescription, or number of cycles of bowing, or silent and loud prayers, or the descent of the angels of day or night; and every one of these points of view has its own reasoning. So, the exact identity of the middle prayer is left obscure and open to different interpretations. But why did God conceal its identity from us? We say that He concealed it in order that we all observe and recognise that there is a difference between a thing being recognised clearly for what it is, and it being concealed in the midst of other things so that, they all might be it: for this leads to our being mindful of all the prayers.

As long as the middle prayer could be the dawn, midday, mid-afternoon, sunset, or night prayer, this is all the more reason to be mindful of all the prayers. The ambiguity of the matter serves only to widen its relevance. God *the Most High* made the exact date of *laylatul Qadr* ('the Night of Power') vague for the very same reason; so, instead of there being only one Night of Power, there are several.⁽¹⁾

This is the case with 'Maintain with care the [obligatory] prayers and [in particular] the middle prayer...', that is, the five prayers in general and each

(1) The Night of Power is the night when God sent down the Quran to the earth. Muslims are greatly encouraged to observe the night with acts of worship and devotions. The exact date of the night is not known with certainty, but the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* says that it is one of the nights of the last ten days of the month of *Ramadan* – Ed.

individual one of them specifically. The True Lord *the Most High* wants us to stand in devotion in each prayer, and the plain command here is: ‘...and stand up full of devotion towards God.’ The word *qunut*, (‘devotion’), is derived from a root meaning of ‘doing something constantly.’ The Noble Quran urges us to be constant in obedience to God *the Most High* with humility and submission. We see a form of this word used in the noble words of the True Lord *the Most High* where He describes the worshipper who devoutly (*qanitan*) worships God throughout the night, prostrating himself or standing in prayer, ever-mindful of the life to come, and hoping for his Lord’s Mercy. God, then, commands His Messenger to put forth the rhetorical question as to whether those who know and those who do not know can be deemed equal. Then God states that only those who are endowed with insight keep this in mind (*az-Zumar*: 9).

The True Lord *the Most High* is commanding His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to tell us Muslims, we who believe in His Message, to compare the one who humbles himself before God throughout the night, spending it standing and prostrating in prayer, hoping for the mercy of his Lord, and the one who calls on his Lord at times of trouble and forgets Him at times of ease: are those who know the rights of God, and obey Him and declare His Oneness, equal to those who do not know, and neglect to look at and perceive the signs of God’s Power?

The way to remember God is to renew one’s connection with Him and stand before Him in prayer. We are commanded to perform the prayer even in the midst of battle, which is why God established the prayer of fear (in times of fighting) for us. Fighting is something which takes one away from his security, so, God *the Most High* says, ‘...And if you fear [an enemy, then pray] on foot or riding....’ Even in the midst of fighting and danger, we must not forget the remembrance of God because we are most in need of God when we face our enemy. For this reason, we should not take the occasion which most befits us to be with God, and make it an excuse for forgetting God.

The same is the case of the ill person. As long as he is ill, he is in the company of God, so, it is not fitting that he abstains from praying; for no one is excused from it even the ill person: if he cannot pray standing, he prays sitting; if he cannot pray sitting, he prays lying down; and this continues even if he is forced to pray only by making motions with his eyes. Likewise, if you

fear an enemy then pray, whilst walking, that is, whilst travelling on foot, or while riding. The word *rijal* is the plural of *rajil* which means to walk on one's feet. This same word is also used in another Noble verse where God *the Most High* commands His Messenger to proclaim to all people the duty of pilgrimage; and they will come to him *rijalan* (on foot) and riding on every kind of fast mount, coming from every far-away point on earth (*al-Hajj*: 27).

People used to perform the obligation of the pilgrimage on foot, or riding on camels which they spurred on to travel from far-away places. So (*rajil*) means someone who travels on foot. Feet were created to carry man's body when he stands, and to make him move when he walks. When one stands still, his feet carry him, and when he walks, his feet move. The meaning here is that the prayer is obligatory for the believers as they travel on foot or riding.

The True Lord *the Most High* legislated the prayer of fear by dividing the believers into two groups: one group prayed with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* in the first *rak'a* (cycle of bowing), and then, completed the prayer on their own, and the second group came to be led by the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in the following cycle so that the prayer was finished for the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* after which he waited for them until they finished their prayers, and then, gave the greeting of peace with them to end the prayer. The first group had the blessing of having begun the prayer with the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, and the second group had the blessing of having finished the prayer with the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. This arrangement was employed at the battle of Dhat Ar-Riqa', and each of the two groups faced the enemy to guard the other group during the prayer.

I have an opinion regarding this matter, which is that the prayer of fear, which the jurists mention, was only for those battles in which the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was present because there could not be some troops who prayed behind the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, whilst the others were denied this, and therefore God *the Most High* apportioned the blessing of praying with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to both groups. But when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* passed on to the Highest Companion, it was possible for those facing the

enemy to have one *imam* (prayer leader) and the other group to have another *imam*. So the dividing of the prayer behind a single *imam* in the prayer of fear was only because the *imam* in that case was The Highest *Imam peace and blessings be upon him*, and God did not want some people to be prevented from praying with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* by others, so, He divided the single prayer between them. But in our time, when things have been organised, and all people have become equal, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* is no longer amongst us, it is correct for each group to pray behind their own *imam*.

From God's words '...And if you fear [an enemy, then pray] on foot or riding...' we can understand that one is not exempted from prayer even when facing the enemy in battle; when the time for prayer comes, the believer must pray if he can, and if he cannot, he must say 'God is great' twice.⁽¹⁾ The True Lord *the Most High* then says, '...then remember God [in prayer], as He has taught you that which you did not [previously] know.' That is, remember that God taught you those things which you did not know; for had He not taught you them, what would you have done?

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* returns to speaking about the widowed woman, saying:

وَالَّذِينَ يُتَوَفَّوْنَ مِنْكُمْ وَيَذَرُونَ أَزْوَاجًا وَصِيَّةً لَّأَزْوَاجِهِمْ مَّتَّعًا
إِلَى الْحَوْلِ غَيْرَ إِخْرَاجٍ فَإِنْ خَرَجْنَ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي مَا
فَعَلْنَ فِي أَنْفُسِهِنَّ مِنْ مَّعْرُوفٍ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٢٤٠﴾

If any of you die and leave widows, make a bequest for them: a year's maintenance and no expulsion from their homes [for that time]. But if they leave of their own accord, you will not be blamed for what they may reasonably choose to do with themselves: God is almighty and wise [240] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 240)

In a previous verse, the True Lord *the Most High* said, 'And those who are taken in death among you and leave wives behind - they, [the wives, shall]

(1) See Al-Qurtubi's exegesis of the noble verse (*al-Baqara*: 239).

wait four months and ten [days]. And when they have fulfilled their term, then there is no blame upon you for what they do with themselves in an acceptable manner. And God is Cognisant of what you do' (*al-Baqara*: 234).

So here, we have before us two rulings concerning those who die and are survived by wives. One ruling says that they must undergo a waiting-term of four months and ten days; the other ruling says that when the husband is met with death, its causes, or its preludes, he should counsel and advise that his wife remain in his home for a whole year without being disturbed. The first four months and ten days are obligatory, whilst the rest of the year is optional; if she wants, she can take it; and if not, she can do otherwise.

'And those who are taken in death among you and leave wives behind – for their wives is a bequest....' This bequest is from the husband when he is about to die.

So, the woman whose husband dies is between two rulings: one compulsory ruling that obliges her to stay for four months and ten days, and another ruling where her husband bequeaths her the right to stay for a whole year without being disturbed, unless she decides to leave of her own accord, '...without turning [them] out [of the dead husband's home]...' i.e. without anyone forcing them to leave. '...But if they leave [of their own accord], then there is no blame upon you for what they do with themselves in an acceptable way. And God is Exalted in Might, Wise.' She has the choice whether to stay a full year according to her husband's bequest, or whether to leave after four months and ten days.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَالْمُطَلَّقَاتُ مَتَّعٌ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ حَقًّا عَلَى الْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٢٤١﴾

Divorced women shall also have such maintenance as is considered fair: this is a duty for those who are mindful of God [241] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 241)

That is, all divorced women, under all circumstances, have the right to maintenance; but God *the Most High* clarified for us that this maintenance is for each one if you have not settled on a dowry for them. In a previous verse we have

read God's words: '...But make provision for them – the wealthy according to his capability and the poor according to his capability' (*al-Baqara*: 236). If you have specified a dowry for her, she takes half of what you settled on. It is as though God has made an appropriate ruling for every situation, and every divorced woman has right to the maintenance as God declared for her. Then we need to reflect on what the True Lord *the Most High* says after this:

كَذَٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ ءَايَاتِهِ ۚ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٢٤٢﴾

**In this way God makes His revelations clear to you,
so that you may grow in understanding [242]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 242)**

We know from what we have seen before that 'signs' (verses) are amazing things. And when the True Lord *the Most High* alerts the mind to receive a certain ruling rationally, it can be noticed that if the pure intelligence directs its thought to a study of the causes of this subject, it will only arrive at this same ruling. Because of this, you find that the True Lord *the Most High* allows some disputes in dealings and eruptions of enmity to stray from the ruling which God ordained concerning any of the matters just mentioned, and then society is afflicted with the evil result of this infringement. It is as though by this, He is confirming the wisdom of what He legislated; if no evil came from these infringements, people would say that there was no need for that legislation; and they would leave the legislation aside without being afflicted with any evil.

So, when we do not adhere to God's laws, logic and universal perfection dictate that bad things happen; for if no bad things happened, people would accuse God's way, saying: Lord, we did not adhere to Your way, yet nothing bad happened to us. It is as though the bad things we find in society are there to alert us to the truth of God's teachings and the perfection of His wisdom in defining His way. In this way, those who contravene God's way are thereby indirectly helping God's way.

After this, the discourse moves on to treat a matter of faith, which is that when God destines something, no creature can escape this destiny. He *the Exalted* says:

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ خَرَجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ وَهُمْ أُلُوفٌ حَذَرَ الْمَوْتِ
فَقَالَ لَهُمْ اللَّهُ مُوتُوا ثُمَّ أَحْيَاهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَذُو فَضْلٍ عَلَى النَّاسِ
وَلَكِنْ أَكْثَرُ النَّاسِ لَا يَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٢٤٣﴾

[Prophet], consider those people who abandoned their homeland in fear of death, even though there were thousands of them. God said to them, ‘Die!’ and then brought them back to life again; God shows real favour to people, but most of them are ungrateful [243] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 243)

After speaking about things connected to the Muslim family in the situation of the separation of husband and wife either by divorce or death, the True Lord *the Most High* wanted the Islamic community to know that no one can escape God’s destiny. The Islamic community is the community which God trusted to bear the Message and Way of Heaven to earth until the end of time, for Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would not come again and no other prophet would be sent. A community like this had to be educated in a way which is commensurate with the mission with which God has charged it, and the True Lord *the Most High* will surely place in the hands of this community everything that the succession of messengers in the previous nations encountered and underwent so that they could take admonition from these events, and represent the way of God, not just by speaking theoretically, but by studying real events which befell past societies.

The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to alert us to the basis of this issue, which is that He Alone gives life, and the One Who gives life is the One Who takes it. He did not allot to man the means to give life, but rather, it is He *the Exalted* Who gives life and deals death. Life and death are the means for the preservation of the human species; however, the preservation of individual lives only comes from the sustenance which in turn must be earned.

The True Lord *the Most High* treats this issue by presenting an incident which Moses *peace be upon him* experienced with his people, the children of Israel. We know that the story of Moses *peace be upon him* and his people is the story which the Quran gives most space to because this was the community

which caused much toil for messengers and prophets, and it was necessary that the True Lord *the Most High* present this matter completely to the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in accordance with what actually took place; He *the Exalted* therefore says, 'Did not see those who left their homes in their thousands, fearing death?...'. We know from these words that the reason they left their homes was fear of death; as for the cause of this death, the verses do not specify what it was, although exegetes have spoken at length about this, some saying that they left their homes in fear that they would die of a plague which had infested the land, and others saying that they left fleeing an enemy who had subjugated them with the intention of eradicating them. What is important is that they sought to flee from fear of death.

So, the Quran deals with this issue according to what mattered the most; but as for why they fled, this is not important because the Quran is not chronicling history, so, it does not say where these things happened, or the time they took place, nor who was responsible, nor does it specify the names of the people involved; the Quran is not concerned with any of these details. Those people who tire themselves out investigating the details of these matters in the stories of the Quran are only trying to link events to specific times, and specific places and specific people.

We say to them: Had the Quran wanted this, it would have done it, and had this had any kind of relevance to the lesson and the admonition, the True Lord *the Most High* would have told us of it. You are weakening the significance and import of the story with these details because if the time of the story is specified, someone might say, 'During the time in which this story took place, it was possible that such a thing could happen, but nowadays, it is no longer possible;' or it might be said, 'The place in which this story occurred was a possible setting for it, but in other places, it would not be possible.' Likewise, if we specify the people involved, it will be said, 'The story could only have taken place for those specific people because such accidental events in the universe are not repeated.'

When God *the Most High* makes the factors of time, place, characters and general settings ambiguous in a story, He *the Exalted* gives it life in every age and every place and with all people; and no one would be able to say that it is

restricted to a specific setting. I always give the example for this of the people who try to determine the time, place and identity of the People of the Cave and their dog. We say to them: You are not enriching the story because when you determine a time, place and characters for it, it will be said, 'It is only beneficial for the time in which it took place.'

For this reason, the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to make it ambiguous. He made it ambiguous so it would have general application; when He wants to specify, He mentions names. We find an example of this in the verse where God *the Most High* says that He puts forth for those who disbelieve the example of Noah's wife and Lot's wife: they were wedded to two of God's righteous servants, and each one betrayed her husband; and neither of the two husbands will be of any avail to these two women before God when they are told on Judgment Day to enter the Fire with all those who enter it (*at-Tahrim*: 10).

The True Lord *the Most High* did not give the name of either of these two women, but only mentioned what was important which was that each one of them was married to a noble messenger; yet despite this, Noah *peace be upon him* was not able to remove the idolatrous doctrine from his wife, nor was Lot *peace be upon him* able to remove the idolatrous doctrine from his wife. Rather, both wives plotted against their husbands – though they were messengers – with their people and because of this, both of them were destined for Hell. One lesson we get from the story is that choosing one's doctrine is something left up to every individual person, and freedom of doctrine is one of the clear principles of the Way of God.

Also, He *the Exalted* gives the story of the wife of Pharaoh as an example for those who believe; as she prayed to her Lord to build for her a mansion in paradise with Him, and to save her from Pharaoh and his doings, and save her from all evildoing people (*at-Tahrim*: 11).

He did not mention her name either because it is not what concerns us here; what concerns us is that she was the wife of someone who claimed to be a god, yet, despite this he could not convince his own wife that he was a god. But when He *the Exalted* wanted to make the story specific to one particular person, He *the Exalted* said that He puts forth as another example for those who believe Mary Daughter of 'Imran *peace be upon her* who guarded her chastity, and God

breathed of His Spirit into her, and she accepted the truth of her Lord's words and of His books, and was one of the truly devout (*at-Tahrim*: 12).

The True Lord *the Most High* mentioned her and her father's name because the thing that happened to her will never be repeated for any other woman. So to those who try to strengthen a story by mentioning its detail, we say: You are making the story poorer. What is important is that the True Lord *the Most High* wants to say that they left their homes in their thousands for fear of death. We want to take a moment to consider linguistically the words of the True Lord *the Most High*: 'Have you not considered....'

When you say to someone, 'Did you not see?' this usually means: did he not see it with his eyes? And I say: did the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers with him and the believers, who came after him until the end of time, see this event? No; the event reached them by their hearing of it, not seeing it. We know that sight takes place with the eye, and hearing with the ear, and tasting with the tongue, and smelling with the nose, and touching with the hand. These are the means by which the mind is given perception and sensation so that it can generate ideas; and about this God *the Most High* says that He has brought us forth from our mothers' wombs knowing nothing; but He has endowed us with hearing, sight, and minds so that, we might have cause to be grateful (*an-Nahl*: 78).

So, the means of knowledge comes through the senses, and the chief sense is the eye; for you may hear something from someone according to his own experience, but when you see the thing for yourself, you have your own experience. This is why it is said, 'The one who sees is not like the one who hears.' When the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to address us with the following question: Do you not know, you whom I address with the Quran, the story of these people? He *the Exalted* phrased it in this way: 'Did you not see those who left their homes....' This means: 'Do you not know...?' and knowledge here is by which means? It is through hearing. Why did He *the Exalted* not simplify things by saying, 'Did you not hear' instead of 'Did you not see'? By saying 'Did you not see,' He tells you of something which took place before you existed, or something which will take place after your existence, so, you must receive it in the same way you receive that which you have seen

with your own eyes; for God *the Most High*, Who created the senses, is more truthful than the senses. For this reason, we find that the True Lord *the Most High* says, addressing the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, with a rhetorical question: ‘Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the Army of the Elephant?’ (*al-Fil*: 1).

We know that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was born in the Year of the Elephant, and he did not see this event; so how could God *the Exalted* ask him, ‘Have you not seen?’ The meaning of this is ‘Do you not know?’, ‘Have you not heard it from Me?’ He did not say ‘Have you not heard?’ to affirm for him that He will be telling him of something that he had not seen, but since the True Lord *the Most High* was telling him of it, it was as though he did see it with his own eyes. It is as though God is saying: This matter is settled, and when I tell you of it, it is as though you have seen it.

In our daily lives we hear people say, ‘So-and-so is such a vivid storyteller!’ This means that he tells you the story as though he saw or heard it for himself. The vivid storyteller makes you think that he himself saw, and he himself heard. The True Lord *the Most High* tells us about these people here, saying, ‘Did you not see [consider] those who left their homes in their thousands, fearing death? God said to them, “Die” then He restored them to life....’ He *the Exalted* tells us that the thing which they fled from caught up with them because no one can avoid God’s destiny; so, God made them die and then resurrected them so that, they could take heed. Had God left their revival until the Day of Resurrection, they would not have taken in the lesson because after the Day of Resurrection, there will be no reflection or moral responsibility, and none of this will have any relevance.

God’s words ‘fearing death’ give the reason for their leaving their homes. The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to show them that precautions do not avail anything where this matter is concerned: You left your homes in fear of death, so, I shall make you die; and as for that which you sought after death, I shall make something else happen to you. For this reason, He brought them back to life again so that they would grieve, and live the rest of their appointed lives. ‘...then He restored them to life....’ to show them that death is in His hand. Whether they feared death from their enemies, or from plague

and disease, the essence of the matter does not change. If the verse had said that they left their homes for fear of plague, we would not understand from it that they might have left their homes for fear of their enemies; so, the ambiguity of the direct cause serves to enrich the story.

God's words 'in their thousands' show us the extent of their failure and foolishness; for how could they leave out for fear of numbers when they themselves numbered in their thousands, and not a single one of these thousands said to them, 'Life and death are in the hand of God'? 'Did you not see [consider] those who left their homes in their thousands, fearing death? God said to them, "Die"....'

When you issue an order to someone under your command, he must have the power to do what you command. If you say to someone, 'Die', will they die? If he causes himself to die he will have killed himself; and there is a big difference between dying and killing oneself. Death comes without any participation from the one who dies, whereas killing might be caused by suicide or any other means; the important thing is that it is an act of killing, not death.

The True Lord *the Most High* shows us the difference between killing and dying when He addresses the believers saying that Muhammad is but a messenger; all the other messengers before him have passed away; if, then, he dies, or is killed, will they turn about on their heels? He who turns about on his heels can in no way harm God, and God will reward all who are grateful to Him (*Al-Imran*: 144).

This verse came to extract lessons from the defeat of Uhud when the report went around the Muslims that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had been killed, whereupon some of them thought of leaving Islam. The True Lord's words came to show that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was a prophet who had been preceded by other messengers who brought God's way, and it was not right for the community of Islam, whom God *the Most High* had entrusted with completing His way, to have its faith shaken by the death of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*; for whoever apostatised and turned on his heels would not harm God in the least, and the reward would be for those who were grateful for, and aware of, the grace of God's way.

We should know that the True Lord *the Most High* mentioned death in contrast to killing, and clarified the matter of death in the verse where He said that no human being can die except by God's leave, at a term pre-ordained. And if one desires the rewards of this world, God shall grant him of it; and if one desires the rewards of the life to come, God shall grant him of it; and God shall reward those who are grateful (*Al-Imran*: 145).

So, death is tied to God's will and Omnipotent Power and His setting of a pre-ordained term for every life which cannot be brought forward or put back; and everyone will find the results of their works, and those who work for this world alone will receive their reward in it, and those who work for the Hereafter will be rewarded by God in this life and the next. For this reason the command of the True Lord *the Most High* was issued by His words: '...God said to them, 'Die' then He restored them to life....' It was not their will to make their own deaths, or to return to life, but rather, this was a matter of compulsion. They died by the Omnipotent Power of God which is represented by the words 'Be! – and it is'; and they came back to life by the Omnipotent Power of God which is represented by the words 'Be! – and it is.' They had no say in their deaths, nor in their revivals; it was a matter of compulsion, just as the True Lord *the Most High* formerly addressed the sky – and it was but smoke – and the Earth and ordered them to come – willingly or against their will – and they replied that they would come in obedience (*Fussilat*: 11).

His will was to create the sky in the form of smoke, so, it came into being; and He created the heavens and the earth according to His will, and it was as easy for Him as to simply say to a thing, 'Come into being, whether you like it or not,' and it heard and obeyed Him. These are matters of compulsion from the Most Noble Creator, and no creature in the heavens, nor the earth, nor in what lies between them, can do anything, but obey the command of compulsion from the Creator *the Most High*. When the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...“Die” then, He restored them to life...' this was a command of compulsion to die, and a command of compulsion to come back to life.

Was it not death in the first place that they feared and ran from, and fled in order to evade? It was; but no one can evade the destiny of God because the True Lord *the Most High* wanted them to know that no one can flee from

God's destiny without running straight into God's destiny. This is why when our master 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *God be pleased with him* wanted to prevent people from going to a land where there was plague, they said to him: 'Do you want to flee from God's destiny?' 'Umar *God be pleased with him* replied, 'Yes, we flee from God's destiny to God's destiny.' This makes one submit to God completely with all his being; it is true that one should be cautious, but the destiny which God has ordained will come to pass. The believer utilises the means, and submits his affair to God.

Someone might say: Why did God *the Most High* not leave those people of the children of Israel to die, and leave it until the Day of Resurrection to bring them to reckoning? I say: The True Lord *the Most High* wanted, by issuing a command of compulsion for them to be raised to life again, to impart a lesson and an admonition, which would remain before the eyes of all people, preserved in the noblest Book which God ever preserved to be a way for the people, the Noble Quran. The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to give an admonition, a caution, and an experience. They died by a command of compulsion, and then returned to life by another command of compulsion, and then lived the life which had been destined for them and then died whether they liked it or not. The lesson therefore remained for every true believer so that he would not fear death in God's Way.

By this experience, God wanted us to accept the struggle in God's Way so that no one would imagine that fighting is what brings about death, for death and life are in the Hand of the One Who gives life. Here are the words of Khalid ibn Al-Walid *God be pleased with him* as he lay on his deathbed, still here for every believer in God to consider: 'I witnessed a hundred military advances, or thereabouts and there is not a hand's span of my body but it has been struck with a sword or pierced by a spear; yet here I die on my bed as a camel dies! May the eyes of cowards never sleep!'

So, the matter of life and death is not tied to fighting or anything else, but is rather determined by God's Will. Let us consider how the True Lord *the Most High* concludes this verse: '...And God is full of bounty to the people, but most of the people do not show gratitude.' What is 'bounty'? It is that you are given more than you need. The True Lord *the Most High* does not only give people what they need, but rather, He gives them more than they need.

Therefore, if those people who left their homes for fear of a plague or an enemy had died, this death would have been a bounty from God; for had they died from plague, they would be counted as martyrs, and this is a bounty from God; and had they died when fighting their enemy and struggling in God's Way, they would also have attained martyrdom, and this is a bounty from God.

Why would this manner of death have been a bounty from God? Because we will all die, and if a person dies as a martyr in God's Way, this is an additional gift. Yet most people are ungrateful because they do not know the extent of the blessing inherent in the things which the True Lord *the Most High* sends to them; for if people knew the extent of the blessings inherent in the events which the True Lord *the Most High* sends upon them concerning life and death, they would thank God for everything that happens to them. The True Lord *the Most High* only sends upon mankind, His handiwork, that which rectifies this handiwork and that which is good for this handiwork.

The True Lord *the Most High* preserved the lesson of what He sent upon some of the children of Israel in order for us to see that fighting in God's Way is one of God's blessings upon His servants, for there is no fleeing from God's destiny. An Arab poet put it like this:

O you who would hold me back from attending the battle

And bid me seek pleasure: can you give me eternal life?

If you are unable to ward off my destiny,

Let me, then, meet it with all of my powers.

The poet is saying to the one who calls him not to fight, but, instead, to enjoy life's pleasures: As long as you cannot give me eternal life, and you cannot keep death away from me, let me go and fight in God's cause with all my powers.

After speaking about the attempt of some of the children of Israel to flee from God's destiny so that He caused them to die with compulsion and then raised them back to life with compulsion – and this is a clear lesson for the believers who would be faced with the matter of fighting in God's Way, telling them: Do not worry, O believers, that fighting will cause you to die since death can come at any time. After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٤٤﴾

**Fight in God's cause and remember that He is all hearing
and all knowing [244] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 244)**

This is a clear command to fight in God's Way without fearing death. Why? This is due to the fact that the One who gives life and ordains its term is '...All-Hearing, All Knowing.' He hears all that those who fight say, and knows their intentions.

In the past, struggling (in combat) was a heavy burden for the one who did it because he would have to spend on himself, and his mount – a horse or camel – and his weapon. Every warrior would have to equip himself for war; and if he was prepared to give up his life, he was all the more prepared to give up his wealth, and to equip himself for war. Because of this, to fight with one's life and wealth was essential. God *the Most High* says, 'And fight in the Way of God...' that is, fight with your own life; then He *the Exalted* moves on to the matter of wealth, saying:

مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يُقْرِضُ اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا فَيُضَاعِفَهُ لَهُ أَضْعَافًا
كَثِيرَةً ۚ وَاللَّهُ يَقْضِي وَيَبْصُطُ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٢٤٥﴾

**Who will give God a good loan, which He will increase for
him many times over? It is God who withholds and God who
gives abundantly, and it is to Him that you will return [245]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 245)**

When you hear the words 'lend to God a goodly loan,' this is a tremendous matter since when you give a person a loan, it is as though you are giving God a loan, but the matter is not clear. Why? Because that person will benefit directly, whilst when you spend in God's Way, you do not give something to a specific person, but rather, you give to the general spirit of religion, and your dealing therein is with God. It is as though, when you spend money to equip yourself for war, you give a loan to God.

By using the word 'loan', the True Lord *the Most High* wants to alert us to the fact that He is seeking from us an action which is not easy for the human

soul; and He *the Exalted* knows the nature of the soul. The Arabic word for 'loan' (*qard*) literally means to gnaw at something with one's teeth. He *the Exalted* knows that loaning is a difficult thing, and in order to show people that He knows its difficulty, He says 'lend to God a goodly loan.' He appreciates its difficulty, and He rewards it according to this difficulty.

'Who is it that will lend to God a goodly loan...?' What is a goodly loan? If you give a loan to one of God's servants, is this not a goodly loan? First of all, if you give a loan to one of God's servants, it is as though you have given a loan to God. It is true that you give a person that which allows him to get out of a difficult situation, and it is also true that when you engage in struggle, you do not give anything to a specific person, but rather, you give to God directly. He *the Exalted* tells us: Whoever gives a loan to my servants, thereby gives a loan to Me. How? Because God is the One Who called all of His servants into existence; and if one of His servants needs something, his need is for his provision in this world. So if a servant gives to his brother, it is as though he is giving a loan to God, who took it upon Himself to provide for this needy person.

God's words '...lend to God a goodly loan...' indicate to us that the loan is not wasted because a loan is something you give from your wealth in the expectation that you will get it back; and He *the Exalted* assures you that He is the One Who is borrowing from you, and He will give back what He has borrowed – not in the form you gave it, but rather in a form which has been multiplied many times over: the principal is secured, and increased. This is why He says, 'Who is it that will lend to God a goodly loan? He will multiply it for him many times over...' It is increased manifold according to the standards of God *the Most High*, not our human standards.

The use of the expression 'goodly loan' here indicates to us that the source of the wealth which you loan must be lawful, which is why it was said of the woman who gave charity from money earned by prostitution: 'Would that she had not prostituted herself, and given no charity.'

It is said that the reward for lending is more than the reward for charity even though in the case of charity one gives the whole thing away whilst a loan is a debt which is repaid to the one who gives it. This is because the sting

of giving charity is a one-time thing as it is kind of giving the money and then, giving up all hope of seeing it again; yet, you attach yourself to a loan, and every time you are patient, this is as another good deed to your account. Moreover, the one to whom you give charity might not really be needy whilst no one seeks a loan unless they are truly in need.

Lending money from what you have, makes your money decrease, which is why God *the Most High* repays you for this loan with manifold increase; this perfectly fits His words ‘...withholds and grants abundance...’ in His saying, ‘...And it is God who withholds and grants abundance, and to Him you will be returned’, which means when we go to Him and each of us takes his right at the reckoning; that is to say, the money that you loan out appears to decrease, but God *the Most High* will increase it and repay it abundantly with manifold increase, and in the Hereafter the reward will be great.

God *the Most High* then brings up another matter which He introduces with His words ‘Did thou not see...’ [*al-Baqara*: 246], to emphasise that the report which will come after them is a true event, just as true as if one had seen it. He *the Exalted* says:

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الْمَلَأِ مِنْ بَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مُوسَى إِذْ قَالُوا لِنَبِيِّ لَنَا مَلِكًا
نُقَاتِلَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ قَالَ هَلْ عَسَيْتُمْ إِنْ كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقِتَالُ أَلَّا تُقَاتِلُوا
قَالُوا وَمَا لَنَا أَلَّا نُقَاتِلَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَقَدْ أُخْرِجْنَا مِنْ دِيَارِنَا وَأَبْنَاءِنَا فَلَمَّا
كُتِبَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْقِتَالُ تَوَلَّوْا إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِنْهُمْ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِالظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٢٤٦﴾

[Prophet], consider the leaders of the Children of Israel who came after Moses, when they said to one of their prophets, ‘Set up a king for us and we shall fight in God’s cause.’ He said, ‘But could it be that you would not fight, if it were ordained for you?’ They said, ‘How could we not fight in God’s cause when we and our children have been driven out of our homeland?’ Yet when they were commanded to fight, all but a few of them turned away: God has full knowledge of those who do wrong [246]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 246)

The True Lord *the Most High* is giving us information through words we hear from Him, and we must receive this as though we see the incident with

our eyes. What do we see? ‘Did you not see the assembly...?’ What does ‘assembly’ (*mala’*) mean? It is derived from the verb meaning ‘to fill up’ as a vessel fills up so that, there is no place for it to take any more, and that the container is so filled by what it contains that it cannot take anything else. The word (*mala’*) is used to mean the nobles of a community because it is as though the nobles of a community fill the life of all that is around them so that no one else can displace them. The ‘assembly’ then are the nobles and leaders of the people, who sit to hold council.

‘Did you not see the assembly of the Children of Israel after [the time of] Moses...’ That is, have you not heard of the leaders and nobles of the people after the time of Moses *peace be upon him*? For example, they may be those in the time of Joshua, Ezekiel, or Samuel *peace be upon them*, or any one of them. This does not concern us since the Quran does not mention what era it was. What is important is that they came after Moses *peace be upon him*; ‘...when they said to a prophet of theirs, “Send to us a king, and we will fight in the Way of God”?’

The nobles of the children of Israel gathered to hold council, then, went to the prophet of their time and said to him, ‘Send to us a king.’ From this, we can infer that they had no king; and what can we learn from it being mentioned that they had a prophet, but no king?

We can understand from this that prophethood was concerned with supervising the carrying out of actions, and not carrying them out directly; the king was the one who carried out actions directly. If prophethood directly carried out actions, they would not have asked their prophet to send a king for them. The reason for this is that the one who acts directly is likely to be the subject of hatred from many people, and subject to failure in some of the affairs he manages; and so instead of them directing failure at the highest level, they transferred it to someone lower: the king. This is why they asked the prophet to send them a king to revise the management of things so that prophethood would be a source of truth, not an object of criticism in any way.

The True Lord *the Most High* tells us that He said to the prophet of the children of Israel: ‘You are the ones who asked to fight, and you are the elders’ – that is, the nobles of the people – ‘and you came with the reason for fighting, which is that you were expelled from your homes and your children’ –

that is, you were subjected to such ignominy that you no longer have homes, and you were subjected to such ignominy that you no longer have children after your enemy captured them all. So the reason for asking to fight was there, but despite this, their prophet said to them, ‘...“Would you perhaps refrain from fighting if fighting was ordained for you?”...’ Their prophet made the stipulation clear to them, saying: I fear that I might bring you a king so that you may fight in God’s Way, and then God will make it obligatory for you to fight, but when we actually come to the harsh reality of the matter, you will not have the resolve to fight, and will capitulate.

But they said, ‘...“And why should we not fight in the Way of God when we have been driven out from our homes and our children?”...’ Look at the exactness of how they said they wanted to fight ‘in the Way of God,’ and then attached this to their having been driven from their homes and their children! They wanted to turn things around, and say that their fighting was in God’s Way, after they had suffered the experience of being hurt in those things they loved, namely their homes and children. So God is the refuge for all things, and He *the Exalted* accepted what they said, and considered their fighting to be in His Way.

That they were driven from their homes makes sense; but how could they be driven from their children? They must have left their children to the enemy, and the enemy might have taken them captives. But they were the ones who were driven from their homes, and their relationship with their children is like that which the poet described thus: If you set out to leave a people who had the ability keep you with them [but did not exercise it], it is they who are leaving. Look at the examination here; they were the assembly of the elders of the Children of Israel, and they went to their prophet saying, ‘Send to us a king,’ so that they could make a lawful war to fight in God’s Way; and the prophet said to them what he said, and they said to him, ‘...“And why should we not fight in the Way of God ...”’ that is, ‘How could we not fight in God’s Way?’

So, the command for them to fight was issued, as God *the Most High* says, ‘...But when fighting was ordained for them, they turned away....’ His word ‘was ordained’ (in the passive voice) means that they were the ones who asked to be allowed to fight, so, God made them part of the covenant, which is why the word ‘was ordained’ was used, not ‘He ordained’. Yet despite this,

they turned away, that is, they refused to fight. Their prophet was right in doubting their willingness to fight and in saying to them, ‘...“Would you perhaps refrain from fighting if fighting was ordained for you?”...’ But did they all refuse to fight? No; for there were some of them who could have been described by the poet’s words:

The One who made the truth bitter

Did not leave a single generation bereft of people of truth.

There were some among them who did not reject the command to fight but they were a minority. This is a necessary preparation for what was to come; so, if the majority capitulate, and the masses disappear from around you, do not say, ‘I am a minority,’ for it is not the large number of the group that counts, but rather, what counts is the True Lord’s help and support.

Your enemies might be legion, but they have no aid from the Most-High Divinity; and you might be few in number, but you have the aid of the Most-High Divinity. This is what the True Lord *the Most High* wants us to be aware of when He says, ‘...But when fighting was ordained for them, they turned away, except for a few of them....’ The words ‘except for a few of them’ came to impart a certain matter, which is why at the end of the story God *the Most High* says, ‘...How often has a small company overcome a large company by permission of God...’ (*al-Baqara*: 249).

That is, victory comes by God’s leave. So the thing witnessed is one, but the point of view of those who witness it differs according to their stores of faith. You see a beautiful flower and the vision is shared by all; it pleases you, you look after it, and leave it intact for its beauty to be enjoyed by you and by others; someone else sees it and thoughtlessly picks it, not caring who its owner is. In this way you see that inclinations differ from one person to another. The enemy before us might be many, whilst we are few, and all of us see the enemy as being many and see ourselves as being few, yet, feelings differ: I will consider myself to be accompanied by my Lord, whilst someone else sees them as being many and says, ‘We cannot handle them,’ because he has not included his Lord in the count.

‘...But when fighting was ordained for them, they turned away, except for a few of them. And God has knowledge of the wrongdoers.’ So, to turn away is to wrong oneself because one of the basic meanings of wrongdoing is to give someone’s right to someone else; you were expelled from your home, and you remained in this state, and thereby you wronged yourself, and wronged your children who were taken from you, and you did not take them back; and above all this, you were doing wrong to your religion.

Those who turned away thereby wronged themselves, their families, their society, and their religion. God’s words ‘...and God has knowledge of the wrongdoers’ indicate that God was cognisant of those who crept away secretly, wanting to destroy the morale of the people, those who today are known as the ‘fifth column,’ who subvert morale without anyone seeing them; but God knows them.

These people from the children of Israel asked their prophet to raise up a king for them; and it was enough for the prophet who was sent to them to choose for them the king under whose banner they would fight, but they increased in their reluctance and obstinacy, and wanted to shift the issue to something not connected with religion. The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَقَالَ لَهُمْ نَبِيُّهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ بَعَثَ لَكُمْ طَالُوتَ مَلِكًا قَالُوا أَنَّى
يَكُونُ لَهُ الْمُلْكُ عَلَيْنَا وَنَحْنُ أَحَقُّ بِالْمُلْكِ مِنْهُ وَلَمْ يُؤْتَ سَعَةً مِّنَ
الْمَالِ قَالَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَاهُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَزَادَهُ بَسْطَةً فِي الْعِلْمِ وَالْجِسْمِ
وَاللَّهُ يُؤْتِي مُلْكَهُ مَن يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٤٧﴾

Their prophet said to them, ‘God has now appointed Talout to be your king,’ but they said, ‘How can he be king over us when we have a greater right to rule than he? He does not even have great wealth.’ He said, ‘God has chosen him over you, and has given him great knowledge and stature. God grants His authority to whoever He pleases: God is magnanimous, all knowing’ [247] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 247)

They were the ones who asked their prophet to raise up a king for them, and it was sufficient, then, for their prophet to choose someone and give him

sovereignty over them. But their prophet wanted to implant in them respect for the one he raised as their king, so, He said to them, ‘...Indeed, God has sent to you Saul (Talout) as a king....’ The Prophet who said this belonged to them, and was one of them, and when they asked him to raise up a king for them, they knew that he could reliably do this.

The manners of prophetic behaviour were manifested here when the prophet said, ‘...Indeed, God has sent to you Saul (Talout) as a king....’ He wanted to reassure them that the choice of Saul as king was not his own choice because he was a human being like them. He wanted to remove his human nature from the equation, so, he said, ‘...Indeed, God has sent to you Saul (Talout) as a king....’ And what was their response? ‘...They said, “How can he have kingship over us while we are more worthy of kingship than he is and he has not been given abundance of wealth?”...’ This was the beginning of the reluctance and obstinacy and shifting the issue to something unconnected with religion.

They wanted prominence and wealth, whilst they should have taken the matter on the grounds that the king had come for their own good because they were the ones who asked for him to lead them in war. The matter of choosing the king was for their sake, and for their own good, so why did they imagine that the choice was against their interest, and not for their own good?

Something else we can understand from their words ‘How can he have kingship over us ...?’ It is that this Saul was not a prominent person. Usually when the goings get tough for a community, they begin to think of who will lead them, and usually there are a few prominent personalities about whom these thoughts revolve, and the community thinks that it is possible that one of these people will be chosen. Heaven’s choice of Saul was the opposite of what this community expected, and Saul was an unknown person, which can be inferred from the fact that they said ‘How can he have kingship over us...?’ that is, he never had kingship before.

They ascribed themselves to two lineages: One line had been granted prophethood, namely the line of Benjamin *peace be upon him*, whilst the other had been given kingship, namely the line of Levi, son of Jacob *peace be upon them*. When he said to them, ‘Indeed, God has sent to you Saul (Talout) as a king,’

they began searching for the records of his lineage, and found that he was descended from neither one of them, and this is why they said, 'How can he have kingship over us...?' This shows us that when people want a particular situation to exist, they do not want the man who is best for the job, but rather, the man who is best for themselves, which is shown by their words: 'How can he have kingship over us while we are more worthy of kingship than him...?'

Does kingship come by arrogance and pride? As long as Saul was an unknown person, the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to tell something to every believer which is that when you want to choose, do not let yourself be duped by lineage, descent, or fame, but rather choose the best person from those who have experience, not merely the people of authority. They ignored the fact that the thing they sought from their prophet required two qualities: a man of physical strength, and a man of knowledge; and in Saul, God had chosen for them a man of both physical strength and knowledge.

When we reflect on the contextual flow of the verses, we find that at first God *the Most High* said, 'has sent to you,' so that none of them would be troubled by thinking Saul to be better than he is; but when they were obstinate, he said to them, '...Indeed, God has chosen him over you...' with these words confirming that there was no one among those of them who possessed skill and physical strength who also possessed knowledge, and there was no one among those of them who possessed knowledge who also possessed skill and physical strength. 'Indeed, God has chosen him over you and has increased him abundantly in knowledge and stature....' They should have received God's choice of Saul to be king with acceptance and satisfaction; and so what about if He also endowed him with knowledge and physical strength?

Being gifted with knowledge and physical strength were the qualifications which suited the task for which they wanted a king, which is why the True Lord *the Most High* said, '...And God gives His sovereignty to whom He wills....' It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* were saying to them: Do not think that you are the one who will nominate the right king for yourselves; it is enough for you that you asked Me to send you a king, so, leave Me to choose the right king according to My own standards.

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by saying, ‘...And God is All-Encompassing, Knowing.’ That is, for every situation He has a ruling, and for every position He has the right man, and He *the Exalted* well knows who is right for this task, and who is right for that one; not out of scarcity or paucity of men, but rather, out of infinitude and knowledge.

They received this Divine choice with obstinacy, and obstinacy is a kind of stubbornness which can only be ended with something which is directly visible to be seen and which constitutes absolute proof; so, it was necessary for a miracle to come, and for this reason the True Lord *the Most High* then, said:

وَقَالَ لَهُمْ نَبِيُّهُمْ إِنَّ آيَةَ مُلْكِهِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَكُمُ التَّابُوتُ فِيهِ
سَكِينَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَبَقِيَّةٌ مِّمَّا تَرَكَ آلُ مُوسَىٰ وَآلُ هَارُونَ
تَحْمِلُهُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَةً لَّكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢٤٨﴾

Their prophet said to them, ‘The sign of his authority will be that the Ark [of the Covenant] will come to you. In it there will be [the gift of] tranquillity from your Lord and relics of the followers of Moses and Aaron, carried by the angels.

There is a sign in this for you if you believe’ [248]

(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 248)

The True Lord *the Most High* sent with King Saul a sign to show he was chosen by God to be king, and their prophet said to them, ‘...Indeed, the sign of his kingship is that the ark will come to you....’ That is, the sign which indicates his kingship is that ‘the ark will come to you.’ We can infer from this that the ark was absent and missing, and that it was something known to them, and that they were anxiously awaiting its coming.

What is the ‘ark’? The Arabic word for ark (*taboot*) appears twice in the Quran: once in the verse which we are currently examining, and another time in the account that God *the Most High* told Moses about his childhood when God instructed Moses’s mother with inspiration to place Moses the child in a *taboot* (chest) and throw it into the river, and thereupon the river will cast him ashore, and one who is an enemy to God and an enemy to him (to Moses) will adopt

him. And then God told Moses that He thus spread His love over him – and this was in order that he might grow and be formed under God's eye (*Ta Ha*: 38-39).

So, we know the ark from the days of the infancy of Moses *peace be upon him*, when his mother feared for his life, so, God *the Most High* inspired to her when she had cause to fear for him, to cast him into the river (*al-Qasas*: 7). Is this, then, the same ark which the verses we are now examining speak of?

It is likely that it is the same one because as long as it is referred to in this unrestricted way, it must mean the well-known ark. It is as though the means by which Moses *peace be upon him* was saved had a history with Moses, Pharaoh, their prophet, and Saul. From this, we can infer that we must take care of the relics connected with significant moments in the history of religion, and we should not say that they are objects of disbelief and idolatry; this is because they have a connection to doctrinal matters, and historical events, and a connection to sacred things. Look at the ark which contained the relics of that which the Houses of Moses and Aaron *peace be upon them* left behind them, borne by the angels: this shows that it is something significant and important.

So, the relics which have a link and a connection to the events of religion and prophethood are very important to faith. It is as though the Quran is saying: Leave them as they are, and take counsel and admonition from them because they remind you of sacred things. The ark was lost, which indicates that an enemy had overcome the land in which they lived; and when an enemy lusts after a land, he first tries to destroy the sacred objects which link the land to the religion. If the ark was sacred to them in this way, their enemies must have taken it. These enemies are the ones who expelled them from their homelands in their thousands in fear of death; and if they expelled them from their homelands, they would certainly have forced them to leave the ark.

God *the Most High* was assuring them that the sign of the kingship of Saul would be the coming of the ark which they were anxiously awaiting and which was connected to their sacred things. The sign was '...that the ark will come to you in which is assurance from your Lord....' So, psychological serenity will come to you with this ark because when one finds the ark in which a prophet was saved, containing things which we will soon come to know, he feels the peace of his connection with Heaven, a physical connection which makes the soul find peace.

For example, think about how you would feel if it was said to you, ‘This is the Quranic manuscript from which our master ‘Uthman *God be pleased with him* used to read.’ It is a book like any other, but what makes it special is that our master ‘Uthman *God be pleased with him* used to read from it, and you find inner peace when you see it. Also, you might go to the seat of the Caliphate in Turkey, and be told, ‘This is the sword with which Imam ‘Ali *God be pleased with him* used to fight,’ and find that its weight is like that of ten swords, and marvel at how Imam ‘Ali *God be pleased with him* used to hold it and fight with it.

Likewise, when it is said to you, ‘This is one of the hairs of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*,’ or ‘this is the container where he kept his *kuhl*,’ there is no doubt that seeing such things will bring illumination and tranquillity in your heart; and when a person who has some doubts or fears sees them, faith will become stable in his heart.

Because of all this, I say that authority figures should not consider sacred objects to be objects of idolatry and paganism, but rather, they must take care of them and protect them, and show them to the people so that, they will be a source of inner peace and spiritual wellbeing for the people. They should advise people not to become infatuated by them, but they must leave them to remind us of those things connected to our doctrine and our Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Look at what the Quran says about the ark. The True Lord *the Most High* did not say, ‘The ark will come in a state of wholeness,’ and He did not say that it was the ark in which Moses *peace be upon him* was placed, but rather He only said it has ‘...assurance from your Lord and relics of what the family of Moses and the family of Aaron had left....’ It is as though the Houses of Moses and Aaron *peace be upon them* had looked after the relics of their prophets. Also, His words ‘carried by the angels’ confirm for us that there is no doubt that a relic carried by the angels must be something momentous of which the greatest care must be taken. ‘...Indeed, the sign of his kingship is that the ark will come to you....’

Notice that when He says, ‘the ark will come to you,’ God *the Most High* ascribes the act of coming to the ark itself. Was it part of the sign that the ark would come forth as they sat and watched? And because the ark was carried by the angels, no one would see them because they are invisible beings, so, no one

would see them but rather, everyone would see the ark coming to them; which is why the True Lord *the Most High* ascribed the act of coming to the ark itself.

This sight would quicken the hearts, and make those who possessed the hardest of hearts fall down in prostration, saying, 'O Saul, you are the king, and we will not object to you.' We now want to know which relics of Moses *peace be upon him* his house were able to save, and which relics of Aaron *peace be upon him* his house were able to save.

Some people say that it was the staff of Moses *peace be upon him*, and that this was the relic which remained from the House of Moses. This makes sense since it was one of the tools of Moses's miracle. Was it not the miracle which turned into a rapidly-moving snake and quickly swallowed all that the sorcerers had concocted? Moses *peace be upon him* would certainly not neglect a miraculous tool such as this, nor would those who believed in him, after what it did; and it does not make sense that the House of Moses would be careless with a staff about which God *the Most High* asked Moses what this is in his right hand and he answered that it is his staff; he leans on it (*Ta Ha*: 17-18).

There is a long story told about this staff, so, how could Moses *peace be upon him* and his people easily be careless with it? They must have looked after it, and deemed it sacred, and made it one of their prize possessions. The True Lord *the Most High* is showing us that these people were obstinate, argumentative, and hesitant, and that they did not believe in things unless they were tangible, like the ark which came to them alone; it is true that the angels carried it, but they could not see the angels, and they only saw the ark coming to them. The ark '...will come to you in which is assurance from your Lord and relics of what the family of Moses and the family of Aaron had left, carried by the angels. Indeed in that is a sign for you, if you are believers.' There are no signs more wondrous than the coming of the ark in order to prove the veracity of the prophet in that God had sent Saul as a king. If they could not believe in such a thing, they needed to re-examine their faith.

The flow of the Quranic discourse indicates that God *the Most High* silenced them with this argument and silenced them with this sign, and silenced them with the ark; this is implied by the omission of what needed to be said here, namely: So, they accepted Saul as their king, and Saul arranged the preparations

for war, and divided the troops and set them in place. The verses do not mention any of these details. The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

فَلَمَّا فَصَلَ طَالُوتُ بِالْجُنُودِ قَالَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مُبْتَلِيكُمْ بِنَهَرٍ فَمَنْ شَرِبَ مِنْهُ فَلَيْسَ مِنِّي وَمَنْ لَمْ يَطْعَمْهُ فَإِنَّهُ مِنِّي إِلَّا مَنِ اعْتَرَفَ غُرْفَةً بِيَدِهِ ۖ فَشَرِبُوا مِنْهُ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِّنْهُمْ فَلَمَّا جَاوَزَهُ هُوَ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ قَالُوا لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا الْيَوْمَ بِجَالُوتَ وَجُنُودِهِ ۚ قَالَ الَّذِينَ يَظُنُّونَ أَنَّهُمْ مُّلتَقُوا اللَّهَ كَم مِّن فِتْنَةٍ قَلِيلَةٍ غَلَبَتْ فِتْنَةٌ كَثِيرَةً بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿٢٤٩﴾

When Talout set out with his forces, he said to them, ‘God will test you with a river. Anyone who drinks from it will not belong with me, but anyone who refrains from tasting it will belong with me; if he scoops up just one handful [he will be excused].’ But they all drank [deep] from it, except for a few. When he crossed it with those who had kept faith, they said, ‘We have no strength today against Goliath and his warriors.’ But those who knew that they were going to meet their Lord said, ‘How often a small force has defeated a large army with God’s permission! God is with those who are steadfast’ [249] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 249)

The Arabic word *fasala* (rendered here as ‘went forth’) literally means for one thing to separate from another. We have another example of the word used in the Quran when God *the Most High* tells of when the caravan, with which Jacob’s sons were travelling, *fasalat* (was on its way/broke away), their father said to the people around him that he truly feels the breath of Joseph (*Yusuf*: 94).

The statement: ‘The caravan broke away’, means that it left Egypt and went out of it. We also use the word *fasl* to mean the sections of chapters in a book, meaning an amount of connected information which forms a single whole so that when the sections of a book are placed together they form chapters; and when the chapters concerning a particular science are placed together, we call this a ‘book.’

We also use the word *fasl* to mean a ‘class’ or ‘grade’, that is, a group of pupils of the same age and academic level, and we separate them into class

one, class two, class three, and so on according to how many classes and pupils there are. In this way, we understand that the words of the True Lord *the Most High* 'And when Saul went forth with the soldiers...' mean that he separated them from the non-combatants, and divided them into arrayed sections, each one with its own mission.

The Arabic word for 'soldiers' (*junud*) is the plural of (*jund*), which is a singular word that indicates plurality. The root of the word is *janad*, which means strong, hard, thick earth; and since soldiers should be hard and strong; the word *jund* was applied to them. Although the word *jund* is in the singular form, it refers to a group of people, just like the words 'troop' and 'band'; and these kinds of words are called 'collective nouns'. 'And when Saul went forth with the soldiers, he said, 'Indeed, God will be testing you with a river....' That is, when he went to the place where the army was camped, he began to perform his first mission as king. He wanted to test them, as they had been opposed to his being appointed king, so, he wanted to plant his rule in firm soil. He said to them, on behalf of the True Lord *the Most High*, '...“Indeed, God will be testing you with a river. Whoever drinks from it, is not of me, and whoever does not taste it, is indeed of me, excepting one who takes [from it] in the hollow of his hand.’ But they drank from it, except a [very] few of them.”...’ He made it clear to them: You are about to undertake a mission for God, in God’s Way, and He is the One Who will subject you to a test, not I; for the test is commensurate with the mission at hand. I am only here to see that the command is obeyed, and God will now test you by a river: he who will drink of it will not belong to us, except one who scoops up but a single handful.

When you hear the words 'will be testing you,' do not explain this as being an unfortunate thing, but rather see it as a trial which some might pass and others fail. The test here was by a river; and as long as the test was by a river, this word must have had psychological relevance and meaning for them. They must have been thirsty, for if they were not thirsty, the river would not have been a trial. '...“Indeed, God will be testing you with a river. So whoever drinks from it is not of me ...”’

They were thirsty, and when water was spotted they would have rushed to it ravenously to drink it and quench their thirst. Given this, the True Lord

the Most High tested their firmness of resolve by instructing them to refrain from drinking it. The test came by keeping them from that which their souls craved: ‘...So whoever drinks from it is not of me....’ But why is it so? It is so because when they saw what they loved and desired, they would be drawn to it, and would forget about God’s command; and if someone forgets God’s command and favours himself over it, he is not worthy of being in God’s soldiers. But as for the one who sees the water and refrains from it although he is in need of it, he is a man of steadfastness and self-control, and he will be a part of God’s soldiers since he preferred God’s requirement to the requirement of his own belly, and he is fit to undergo the trial.

Despite this, God *the Most High* did not make the trial excessively difficult and allowed them enough to take the edge of their thirst, not barring them from it completely: ‘...“Indeed, God will be testing you with a river. So whoever drinks from it is not of me, and whoever does not taste it is indeed of me, excepting one who takes [from it] in the hollow of his hand.”...’ He allowed them to take a single handful to allay their thirst and keep them alive, and He allowed them enough to meet necessity. But what does this trial have to do with the action they were set to undertake?

The act of war which they were about to undertake would cause them to encounter grave affliction, and to be exposed to the exhaustion of provisions; and they were also exposed to the possibility of their enemies blockading them. In such situations, a warrior must be able to resist his desires, and only use enough of his provisions and water to keep himself alive; and a single handful of water is enough to sustain life. It is as though this training was necessary for the mission; but did they do this?

The True Lord *the Most High* tells us: ‘...But they drank from it, except a [very] few of them....’ In this way, the purification was completed: in the beginning, they turned their backs and refused to fight, save a few of them, and now only a few of these few refrained from drinking. These were the sieves of election, or the filters of testing; one person might be able to withstand half the hardship, and another might be able to withstand a third of it, and another might be able to withstand a quarter of it. A few of them remained, but these were the few who were right for the mission, and had retained their faith.

Look at the filters of trial for struggling in God's Way so that no one bears the banner of the struggle except those who are worthy of doing so and know what it entails. '...Then when he had crossed it along with those who believed with him, they said, "We have no strength today against Goliath and his soldiers."...' That is, when they crossed the river, having passed all the foregoing tests, some of them said, '...“We have no strength today against Goliath and his soldiers.”...' Some of them feared the final test, but those who believed in God did not fear, as the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...But those who were certain that they would meet God said, "How many a small company has overcome a large company by permission of God. And God is with the patient.”'

Their feelings and responses were different although they all were looking upon the same scene. So those who crossed the river were divided into two groups: one group saw Goliath and his forces, and the other group saw the same thing; they were not divided concerning what they saw, but rather, they were divided concerning how they felt and responded concerning what they saw: one group feared whilst the other did not. Those who feared said, 'We have no strength today against Goliath and his soldiers.' Fear of Goliath and his forces arose in their souls, so, they said, 'We have no strength today against Goliath and his soldiers.' They went through three stages: The first stage was that they saw Goliath and his forces; the second stage was that they felt apprehension because of the power of Goliath and his forces, and the final stage was that they began to fear Goliath and his forces. But the group that did not fear, saw the same thing, and God *the Most High* said of them, '...But those who were certain that they would meet God said, "How many a small company has overcome a large company by permission of God.”...'

It is as though they included their Lord in their assessment so that they took their enemy lightly; but the other group detached themselves from their Lord so that they saw themselves as the lesser group, and felt fear. The mere supposition of the believing group that they would meet God was enough to give them this belief; and if this was the case for mere supposition, what about absolute certainty? '...“How many a small company has overcome a large company by permission of God. And God is with the patient.”' We know that there are battles in which those who have the most steadfast

patience are the victors, and our evidence for this is the words of the True Lord *the Most High* in reminding His Messenger when he gave the glad tidings to the believers that their Lord will support them by sending down three thousand angels to help them in the battle of Badr (*Al- 'Imran*: 124).

This is the promise; but if you have patience, what will the aid be? The True Lord *the Most High* reassures the believers that if they are steadfast in adversity and they fear Him, and the enemy should fall upon them in hot haste, their Lord will aid them with five thousand angels with their marks (*Al- 'Imran*: 125).

It is as though the starting position is three thousand angels to aid the people of faith, and then this is increased to five thousand if they have patience and fear God. So aid comes in a way which is proportionate to the people's patience, because the compassion of the Divine Omnipotence for you increases when He finds you are bearing hardships; He has compassion for you, and gives you even more. God wants His servant to utilise all of his personal means of power; and when you utilise all these means with manliness and firmness, God's aid comes to you, and God says to His angels: This one deserves to be aided, so, aid him. For this reason, God *the Most High* stated the statement of the believers: '... "How many a small company has overcome a large company by permission of God. And God is with the patient."'

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَلَمَّا بَرَزُوا لِجَالُوتَ وَجُنُودِهِ قَالُوا رَبَّنَا أَفْرِغْ عَلَيْنَا صَبْرًا
وَتَكُنْ أَقْدَامُنَا وَأَنْصُرْنَا عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٢٥٠﴾

And when they met Goliath and his warriors, they said, 'Our Lord, pour patience on us, make us stand firm, and help us against the disbelievers' [250] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 250)

This is the charge of faith for all who wish to face their enemy, calling out, 'O our Lord.' They do not call, 'O God,' but rather, 'O our Lord' because the Lord is the One Who undertakes sustenance and provision, whilst the implication of 'God' is worship and moral responsibility. This is why the believer calls upon

his Lord in difficult times, saying 'O our Lord,' that is, 'O You Who created us, and Who provides for us and aids us with means.' The believers, who were with Saul, said: '...“O our Lord, pour upon us steadfastness, and set firm our feet, and give us victory over the infidels.”’

When we reflect on the words '...pour upon us steadfastness,' this tells us that they asked God to fill their hearts with patience; and the effect of patience is to make firm one's steps: '...and set firm our feet...' so that they could face the enemy with faith; and at the end of patience and making firm their steps, God's victory came to the believers against the disbelievers, and the result of the faithful resolve and fighting comes in God's words:

فَهَزَمُوهُمْ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَقَتَلَ دَاوُدُ جَالُوتَ وَءَاتَاهُ اللَّهُ الْمُلْكَ
وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَعَلَّمَهُ مِمَّا يَشَاءُ وَلَوْلَا دَفْعُ اللَّهِ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُم بِبَعْضٍ
لَفَسَدَتِ الْأَرْضُ وَلَٰكِنَّ اللَّهَ ذُو فَضْلٍ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٢٥١﴾

**and so with God's permission they defeated them. David killed Goliath, and God gave him sovereignty and wisdom and taught him what He pleased. If God did not drive some back by means of others the earth would be completely corrupt, but God is bountiful to all [251]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 251)**

The True Lord *the Most High* tells us that He gave victory to those who believed in Him; and the True Lord used the expression 'they defeated them,' which indicates that those who should have been on the attack turned away and fled. The warrior should always be attacking; and when he resorts to turning away, we need to stop to clarify his situation: is this retreat a strategy of war, and a way of getting to another position which is a more advantageous spot in which to fight? If this was the case, it does not mean defeat. But if the retreat was not for any strategy to beguile the enemy, but rather out of fear, this means defeat.

God *the Most High* says, 'So they defeated them by permission of God...' which indicates that the forces of Goliath were not all killed, but rather, the leaders of disbelief amongst them were killed; and this is indicated by what

God *the Most High* says next, ‘...And David killed Goliath....’ Goliath was the leader of the disbelieving army which fled, and David *peace be upon him* chased him and killed him. For the first time, the name ‘David’ appears in this long story, and we do not have any information about this name up to this point; and information will come about him after this story, when God *the Most High* says that He graced David with His favour and ordered the mountains to sing with him the praise of God, and also the birds. And He made iron pliable for him and commanded him to make full coats of mail and calculate precisely the links, and commanded all to do good deeds; indeed, God is seeing of what they do (*Saba*: 10-11).

So, the beginning of David’s story came with this battle, after he killed Goliath. David *peace be upon him* was the youngest of eleven brothers, and the prophet said to the people, ‘The man who will enter the battle against Goliath is the one who fits in the armour of Moses *peace be upon him*.’ David’s father tried the armour on all of his sons, and it fit only one of them: the youngest, David *peace be upon him*. The armour fit him, and David *peace be upon him* entered the battle and killed Goliath, the leader of the idolaters; and the wisdom of God decreed that the youngest man amongst the believers would be the one to kill the leader of the idolaters’ army.

This battle was the beginning of the history of David *peace be upon him*, and this battle brought him a mighty victory; and then God *the Most High* blessed him with kingship and wisdom, and made the mountains and the birds repeat with him expressions of the glory and transcendence of God; and all of this was the result of his killing of Goliath. David *peace be upon him* loved the armour, and it became his hope that God might teach him to make armours, which is why he never took up any craft in his life except the making of armours. God made iron malleable for him so he could make whatever he wanted from it, as God *the Most High* says that He taught him the fashioning of coats of armour to protect men from each other’s violence (*al-Anbiya*: 80).

This shows that a person loves those things which are connected with the means by which their standing was raised; and the killing of Goliath was the beginning for David *peace be upon him*. God says, ‘...and David killed Goliath and God gave him the kingship and wisdom and taught him from that which

He willed. And if it were not for God checking [some] people by means of others, the earth would have been corrupted, but God is bounteous to the worlds.' Here, the True Lord *the Most High* makes mention of a natural law of existence, which is that war is a societal necessity, and that the True Lord *the Most High* repels people with people, and that were it not for the presence of power in the face of power, the world would be whelmed in corruption; for if only a single temporal power had control of existence, it would be corrupted.

The thing which keeps the universe alive is the existence of equally-matched powers within it, one power facing another. This is why we find that the world is always guarded by two superpowers; if there were only one power, error would spread everywhere. If we reflect on history since ancient times, we find that this duality of power conserved stability in the world.

At the onset of Islam, the two great powers were the Persian Empire in the East, and the Byzantine Empire in the West. Now that the power of Russia has fallen from the world scales, we see that Germany and Japan are competing to counterbalance the power of America.

God's words '...And if it were not for God checking [some] people by means of others, the earth would have been corrupted...' come as the epilogue to the story of the struggle between the children of Israel and their enemies who expelled them from their homelands. When we reflect on this story from its beginning, we find that the Israelites first asked God for permission to fight, and God *the Most High* raised up a king for them to fight under his banner, and the sign of the truth of this king was that God would bring them the ark. Then came a societal issue at which people can usually arrive by the use of their wisdom without the need even for revelation, which is that when one is about to do something, he must prepare for it with human means so that once his preparations have exhausted all their means, he may turn to God's aid; for as we said, the means are from the Hand of God, so, do not turn down God's Hand with its means and seek God's aid directly, but rather, you must take the means first because they are from the Hand of your Lord.

The True Lord *the Most High* also teaches us that these means include the purification of those who seek to defend the truth in a way which shows us the power of their resolve in the test of faith; for a person might say one thing

with his tongue, but when it comes down to action, his soul tells him not to proceed. A few of the people were able to succeed in all the trials to which they were subjected, and the battle went ahead, and the believers defeated their enemies, and David *peace be upon him* was victorious by killing Goliath.

This was an instance when God checked one people by means of another, and the True Lord *the Most High* then, affirmed this as a general principle: ‘...And if it were not for God checking [some] people by means of others, the earth would have been corrupted...’ That is, had God *the Most High* not used the believing minority to check their many enemies, corruption would have overwhelmed the earth. To check something here means to bar it from its attaining its intention; and if the intention of people is to do evil, God checks this. So God checks, but He makes it through the hands of His servants, as He *the Exalted* commands the believers to fight against the infidels and God will chastise them by their hands, and will bring disgrace upon them, and will give victory to the believers against them; and He will heal the bosoms of those who believe (*at-Tawba*: 14).

God *the Most High* uses the believers to fight the disbelievers, and the True Lord *the Most High* inflicts suffering on the disbelievers by the hands of the believers. When we reflect on the wise words ‘...And if it were not for God checking [some] people by means of others, the earth would have been corrupted...’ we find that there was a previous incident which laid the way for this statement: they were driven from their homes and their children, and this was their motivation for fighting. There is also another verse which speaks about those who have been driven from their homes without right for no other reason than their proclaiming that their Lord is God; and if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, cloisters, churches, synagogues and mosques – where God’s Name is abundantly extolled – would surely have been destroyed. And God will most certainly support him who supports His cause; for, surely, God is Most Powerful, Almighty (*al-Hajj*: 40).

The contexts of the two verses are different: in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, the verse refers to people who were actually at war, whilst the verse in the chapter of *al-Hajj* refers to people who believed in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, who left Mecca, where they were oppressed, to

join their believing brethren in the abode of faith, in order that they might return again one day to enter Mecca as conquerors.

It is true that we find one thing being shared by the two verses, which is that they had left their homes. So in one case the defence is that you turn away in order to return, that is, you leave the abode of disbelief as an emigrant in order to get yourself together along with those who are with you, and then return to your home as a conquering warrior; and in the other case, the defence is that you actually fight right away. The verse which we are currently examining indicates that they actually fought right away whilst the second verse indicates that they left Mecca in order to return later as conquerors so that, the act of leaving itself was a form of defence. Why? If the early Muslims had remained in Mecca, their enemies might have wiped them all out so that no trace of Islam remained. So they went to Medina and established the Islamic state, and then, returned as victorious conquerors 'When there comes the help of God and the victory...' (*an-Nasr*: 1).

The contexts of the two verses are the same, but the outcome is different. Here, the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...And if it were not for God checking [some] people by means of others, the earth would have been corrupted....' Why would the earth be corrupted? It is because the meaning of checking some people with others is that there are some people who accept corruption, whilst others come out from them and try to bring them back to rectitude. The True Lord *the Most High* gives us the reason for this in the second verse, saying that if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, cloisters, churches, synagogues and mosques – where God's Name is abundantly extolled – would surely have been destroyed (*al-Hajj*: 40).

Cloisters (*sawami*') are like the Christian monasteries of today in which people used to worship God; for there are worshippers who fulfil common religious responsibilities, and other worshippers who charge themselves to do more than God commanded them, and those who worship God in this way sit in places far away from other people called cloisters, which are like the monasteries of today. The general meaning of Christian worship is that which takes place in churches, called here *biya* ' in Arabic, whilst the special kind of worship is that which takes place in cloisters.

So, ‘cloisters’ are for those completely devoted to worship, and churches are for the generality of worshippers. The word ‘synagogues’ means the place of worship for Jews, and ‘mosques’ are the places of worship for Muslims.

So, God’s statement ‘...the earth would have been corrupted...’ in this verse and His statement ‘...cloisters, churches, synagogues, and mosques... would surely have been destroyed...’ (*al-Hajj*: 40) means that the earth would be whelmed in corruption if there were no cloisters, churches, synagogues, and mosques because they are what connects created beings to the Creator. Since these are the places which connect created beings to the Creator, if they are destroyed the people will no longer remember their Lord, and they will be infatuated by worldly means.

So, cloisters, churches, hermitages – when they existed – and mosques today are the guardian of morality in the world because they always remind you of your servitude and prevent you from being deluded; the name *masjid* (mosque) is derived from the word *sujud*, meaning prostration which is the ultimate act of humility before the Lord, and in them we humble ourselves before God five times every day and night. If the servant has any kind of delusion, it is sure to melt away, as he knows that the entire universe is a grace from God to His servants. So do not let any delusion enter you, O Muslims; and if no delusion enters you, you will use God’s means to do God’s bidding. But if you take God’s means and use them to do other than God’s bidding, this is an act of shamelessness on your part. Since God has given your hand the ability to move, why do you disobey God with it and strike others? And God gave your tongue the ability to speak, so, why do you speak words that hurt others? God gave you blessings; so, do not use them to disobey Him.

God *the Most High* said in this verse, ‘...the earth would have been corrupted...’ and He explained this when He said that cloisters, churches, synagogues, and mosques – where God’s Name is abundantly extolled – would surely have been destroyed (*al-Hajj*: 40), for these are the places which preserve the roots of religious values; and the ‘roots of religious values’ are not the same as ‘all religious values,’ which is why we said that the True Lord *the Most High* gave Islam five Pillars, and these are what Islam is built upon, and we must build Islam on these five Pillars; so do not say that Islam is these five Pillars. No; Islam

is only built on them, and they are the supports or foundations upon which Islam is built. When you make foundations and set up supports for a house, this alone does not make the house fit to be lived in, but rather, the rest of the building must still be built. So Islam is built on these foundations.

The True Lord *the Most High* clarifies this in commanding us to look after the places which maintain these values because mosques – and we are speaking now about Islamic conventions – are the places where the True Lord's outpourings of illumination meet His creatures, and whoever wants the True Lord *the Most High* to pour His light upon him, should go to the mosque. So in order that the earth is not overwhelmed by corruption, these places of worship must exist; in one place, the True Lord *the Most High* mentions the result, and in the other He mentions the cause.

Why does God *the Most High* check people by means of others? Because there are people who desire evil, and others who desire good, and those who desire evil check those who desire good; and if the battle takes place in this way, the Hand of God will not forsake the side of the believer who seeks what is good; for He *the Exalted* says that He will most certainly support the one who supports His cause; and surely God is Most Powerful, Almighty (*al-Hajj*: 40).

That is, the battle will not be a long one. This is why we said before that of all the battles we see in the universe, we do not find any battle between two forces of truth because there are no two truths in existence, and truth is one. So no one can say that he is on the side of truth and his opponent is also on the side of truth; no, there is only one truth. When battles take place, they take place either between truth and falsehood or between falsehood and falsehood; and the battle between truth and falsehood is never a long one because falsehood always falls away. The battles which are long drawn are those which take place between one falsehood and another, as neither of them deserves to be aided by God for one is corrupt and the other is also corrupt, and He *the Exalted* crushes this corruption with the other; and when one corruption is crushed by another, the two wings of falsehood in the universe come to an end, and then, there come people who have no corruption, and they fill the universe.

In the battles which go on in any place, you find that one party has one caprice and the other party has a different one, and God does not stand on either

side because no one side is more worthy of God than the other. Therefore, He leaves them to struggle with each other; and since the True Lord *the Most High* has left them to each other, the battle will be long; and were God on the mind of one side, He *the Exalted* would stand with them. This is why we see that the battles of modern times go on and on because we do not find the third party mentioned in the command of God *the Most High* that if two groups of believers fall to fighting, make peace between them; but then, if one of the two groups goes on acting wrongfully towards the other, fight against the one that acts wrongfully until it reverts to God's command; and if they revert, make peace between them with justice, and deal equitably with them: for, indeed, God loves those who act equitably (*al-Hujurat*: 9).

The True Lord *the Most High* commands that when two groups of believers fight one another, a third group of believers must make peace between them; and if one transgresses against the other and refuses to make peace, the True Lord *the Most High* commands the believers to fight the side which transgresses until it reverts to God's command; and if it reverts to God's command, the peace made between the two sides must be fair because God *the Most High* loves those who are just and fair.

And we find that falsehood fights with falsehood, and there is no one to make peace between the two falsehoods; rather, we find that caprices battle each other, and every side allies itself with the group that suits its caprice.

This is the great failure of the modern age: battles are long drawn because there is nothing common shared in the minds of those who fight; if there were something common shared in their minds, the war would not have begun. As long as they are heedless of this shared thing, a party must intervene which can affect a truce; but even these people do not intervene to bring about a truce, which inevitably leads to failure in the whole world, and the world will continue to be in this state of failure until they repent and change their ways. They are making the experience longer for themselves, and they will remain in this state of failure until they become aware that the only way for all this to end, is for them to abandon their own caprices in favour of the Will of their Creator.

‘...And if it were not for God checking [some] people by means of others, the earth would have been corrupted....’ Yes, the earth will be whelmed with

corruption in those things over which God has given man influence; as for the things over which God *the Most High* has given man no influence, their natural laws will remain the same, and no one will affect them; no one will affect the sun, or the moon, or the air, or the rain; corruption only occurs in those things over which man has influence.

Look at the universe, and you find that those things over which man has no influence are sound, in the best form they could possibly be in, and corruption only comes to those things in which man intervenes without the guidance of God's way. Had man intervened in them according to God's way, things would have been sound just as the highest natural laws are sound.

In the chapter of *ar-Rahman*, God *the Most High* says that He has raised the sky high and that He has devised for all things a balance (*ar-Rahman*: 7). As long as the True Lord *the Most High* has raised the sky and devised the balance, the sky cannot fall onto the earth, and the system is completely controlled. The sun rises in the east and sets in the west and the moon and stars travel with absolute precision and singularity; this is because no human being has anything to do with it. If you want to make your lives sound, and that your affairs be in as perfect an order as the mechanics of the sky and the earth are, then, apply the balance of Heaven to all your actions. Follow what the True Lord *the Most High* then says: He has raised the sky high and He has devised for all things a balance, so you too, O men, never transgress the balance of what is right; weigh, therefore, your deeds with equity and do not cut not the balance short (*ar-Rahman*: 7-9).

As long as you see that the things in existence over which you have no influence move in an orderly way, and work soundly and you see that corruption comes to those things with which you have interfered, why do we not follow the way of God with those things with which we can interfere? If you follow in life the guidance of the way of God Who created life, your affairs will be sound for you just as the higher matters of the universe are sound. And be especially careful to adhere to His words: He has raised the sky high and He has devised for all things a balance, so you too, O men, never transgress the balance of what is right (*ar-Rahman*: 7-8).

All of us must carefully adhere to these words so that we know that the higher matters are balanced because the hand of man does not interfere with them.

The sky does not fall upon the earth because it is governed by an absolutely ordered system. And the earth does not spin away from its orbit because its Creator has established for it an absolutely ordered system. Because of this, the True Lord *the Most High* says that the system of the celestial bodies in the universe is such that, it is not allowable for the sun to reach the moon, nor does the night overtake the day, but each, in an orbit, is swimming (*Ya Sin*: 40). It is a precisely-ordered system because man has no influence over it. So make a balance for all the things over which you have the ability to exercise your free will so that you do not transgress the balance.

Since God *the Most High* created man and gave him free will and some people choose one path, whilst others chose a contrary path, each path being outside the way of God, the True Lord *the Most High* left the two sides to battle and fight one another; and because He *the Exalted* is Merciful with all mankind, the elements of goodness remain in existence, in case someone sees them, and notices them, and goes to take them. When one group transgresses, the True Lord *the Most High* sends to them another group to set them right so that the elements of goodness remain in existence, in case someone comes to take one of them and applies it to his life; and people of goodness only come because of God's mercy upon mankind. The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

تِلْكَ ءَايَاتُ اللَّهِ نَتْلُوهَا عَلَيْكَ بِالْحَقِّ وَإِنَّكَ لَمِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿٢٥٢﴾

These are the revelations of God which We recite to you [Muhammad] with the truth, and you truly are one of the messengers [252] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 252)

We know that the word 'these' is a sign which God addresses to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* indicating the verses which came before, and which showed the magnificence and sustaining power of the True Lord. The True Lord *the Most High* said previously: Did you not see [consider] those who left their homes in their thousands, fearing death? God said to them, 'Die' then He restored them to life. And God is full of bounty to the people, but most of the people do not show gratitude (*al-Baqara*: 243). Their asking to fight and for God to send them a king, His sending them a king, and His sending them the ark which contained inner peace – were these not all

signs as well? And after this, the True Lord *the Most High* willing the killing of Goliath the giant, to come at the hand of David *peace be upon him* the young lad – was this not a sign? And another sign was that a small group – as they themselves affirmed when they said, ‘...How often has a small company overcome a large company by permission of God and God is with the patient’ (*al-Baqara*: 249), that this small group entered the battle and defeated the larger group; was this not a sign?

Did the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* know about these signs which came before his own mission? No, but he was informed of them by God, as all attest to, especially those who disbelieve in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; since he did not read, write, or sit with a teacher, and no one ever told him anything about those things. Even on the journeys which he undertook for trade, he was accompanied by others; and if they had seen him sitting with anyone to teach him something, they would have made it known that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had sat with so-and-so, and learned from him such-and-such. But no one ever said this because it never happened. Because of this, the fact that He *peace and blessings be upon him* was able to tell them things which they knew themselves was one of the secrets of his miracle; he knew about events of the past even though he never read, wrote, or took knowledge from anyone. One of the idolaters stubbornly disputed, claiming that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had sat with a youth in Marwa who had taught him these things, so the true words of God *the Most High* came to refute this fabrication stating categorically that God indeed knows that they say that it is only a human being who teaches him; the tongue of the one they maliciously refer to is foreign, and the Quran is in a clear Arabic tongue (*an-Nahl*: 103).

The True Lord *the Most High* affirms that this was a spurious argument and a false claim on their part since the one they claimed had taught the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was a non-Arab. The True Lord *the Most High* says to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, ‘These are the verses of God which We recite to you [O Muhammad], in truth....’ The phrase ‘the verses of God’ means wondrous things, and ‘We recite to you’ means God set them down word by word; the Arabic verb *yatlu* (recite) is derived from the

word *wala* which means for one thing to follow another without interruption. ‘...We recite to you [O Muhammad], in truth...’ The truth is that which is fixed in place so that it cannot change, and can never contradict itself.

Suppose an accident takes place in front of you, and then you are asked about it a thousand times throughout your life. You will find that your answer never changes because you are relating an actual event which you witnessed. But if the story is a lie, the way you tell it the second time will change because you do not remember what you said the first time i.e. as you are not relating something real which took hold of you so that you can stick to it. In this way, the truth never changes, or contradicts itself, or conflicts with itself.

‘These are the verses of God which We recite to you [O Muhammad], in truth.’ Since the True Lord *the Most High* is the One relating them, He will relate them to you truthfully, whereupon the others will know that you have come to know the things which they keep secret in their books and tell to one another; upon this, they will know that you are truly one of those entrusted with a message. This is why we find expressions such as ‘you were not there’ in the Quran, as when God *the Most High* tells His Messenger that he was not present repeatedly when He tells him of past events. One instance is God’s telling the prophet that he was not present at the western side of Mount Sinai when He revealed the command to Moses, and he was not among those who witnessed that (*al-Qasas*: 44).

That is, you were not, O Muhammad, present with Moses on the western side of the mountain when God made the covenant of the message with him, and you were not a contemporary of Moses, and you did you witness him delivering the message; so how could your people deny you when you convey to them the stories of those who came before? Another example of this is God *the Most High* telling His Messenger that He reveals to him news from things that are beyond the reach of his perception; for he was not with the elders when they drew lots as to which of them should be Mary’s guardian, and he was not with them when they contended about it with one another (*Al-‘Imran*: 44).

The great stories related to you by the Quran, O Muhammad, of those whom God elected, are from the matters of the Unseen which God has revealed to

you. And you were not present with them when they drew straws to determine who would take care of Mary *peace be upon her*, and you were not with them when they argued over who would be granted this great honour. Another example of this is God *the Most High* telling His Messenger that he was not at the side of the mount when God called Moses but that he was sent as a mercy from his Lord to warn a people to whom no warner had come before him that they might be reminded (*al-Qasas*: 46). That is, you were not, O Messenger, present on Mount Sinai when We called Moses when the appointed time came, and His Lord spoke to him and engaged in intimate discourse with him, but God has informed you of this by revelation out of mercy for you and for your community, and in order that you can tell it to those to whom no messenger came before you, so that they might take heed and have faith.

Another example of this is God *the Most High* telling His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that He has revealed to him a life-giving message, coming at God's behest. Before this message came to him, he did not know what revelation is, nor what faith implies; but God has made this message to be a light, whereby He guides whom He wills of His servants; and, surely, the Messenger, too, guides to the Straight Way (*ash-Shura*: 52).

The Quran is revelation sent down from God, which shows the believers the light of guidance and the commands of the True Lord *the Most High* and guides those who choose guidance; and you, O Muhammad, call by this Quran to a Straight Path. Every statement saying 'you were not' in the Noble Quran is an indication that everything which Gabriel *peace be upon him* tells you as a messenger from God to you, and a bearer of revelation from God, is the truth; so you know it, O Muhammad, by a special means and in a special way even though you never read a book, or sat with a teacher. And the signs of which you tell them are in agreement with the information they have, and they should therefore have said that the One Who taught you this was God *the Most High*, and they should have acknowledged and testified that you are one of those who have been entrusted with a message.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

تِلْكَ الرُّسُلُ فَضَّلْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ مِنْهُمْ مَنْ كَلَّمَ اللَّهُ وَرَفَعَ بَعْضَهُمْ دَرَجَاتٍ
وَأَتَيْنَا عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ الْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَيَّدْنَاهُ بِرُوحِ الْقُدُسِ وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ مَا
أَفْتَتَلَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَتْهُمْ الْبَيِّنَاتُ وَلَكِنْ اخْتَلَفُوا فَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ
ءَامَنَ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ كَفَرَ وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ مَا أَفْتَتَلُوا وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْعَلُ مَا يُرِيدُ ﴿٢٥٣﴾

We favoured some of these messengers above others. God spoke to some; others He raised in rank; We gave Jesus, son of Mary, Our clear signs and strengthened him with the holy spirit. If God had so willed, their successors would not have fought each other after they had been brought clear signs. But they disagreed: some believed and some disbelieved. If God had so willed, they would not have fought each other, but God does what He will [253] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 253)

The True Lord *the Most High* refers to the Messengers by saying, ‘...Those Messengers...’ (*tilka ar-rusul*). The word *rusul* is the plural of (*rasool*), which means the one who is sent to deliver a message, which is a collection of words bearing a meaning which leads to a goal. Since *rusul* refers to a group, why then did the True Lord *the Most High* use the word *tilka* (which literally means ‘that’ used for singular nouns) instead of *ha’ula’i* (‘these’)? This is how the Noble Quran tells you that no matter how the messengers differ, they were all sent by the same One God with the same guidance. As we know, the word *tilka* is a demonstrative pronoun which is used with something distant (‘that’). When we indicate something close, we say in Arabic *dha*, and if we are speaking directly to someone we say *dhak*; or if we are indicating a feminine noun, we say *ti*, and if we are speaking directly to someone and referring to a feminine noun, we say *tilka*; and the letter (*I*) here, as we know, refers to something distant, or something with a lofty status.

God’s words ‘...Those Messengers...’ refer to the messengers known to our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, or the messengers who have previously been mentioned in the Quranic text; and the Quranic text which came before spoke about Moses, Jesus *peace be upon them*, and about *ulu al-‘azm* (those of firm resolve) from amongst the Messengers.

If you wish to consider the Quranic order here, it refers to what has been mentioned in this chapter; if you wish to consider the order of revelation, it refers to those previous messengers known to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. The occasion here is that the True Lord *the Most High* concluded the previous verse by saying, ‘...And indeed, you are from among the messengers’ (*al-Baqara*: 252), and since this statement indicates the Prophet’s membership of a general plurality, it is as though God is saying: Beware of thinking that just because they are united in being message-bearers, or being messengers of God, they are all of equal rank; no; rather, each one of them has his own general level of value as well as his specific level of preference. They are all messengers from God, but the True Lord *the Most High* gives each one of them a specific level of preference.

Since God’s statement ‘...And indeed, you are from among the messengers’ confirms for us that our master the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* is one of the messengers, do not infer from this that all the messengers are equal in rank and say that they are all equally preferred; no; God *the Most High* has preferred some of them over others. What does it mean to prefer? It means that you go to someone and give him some kind of distinction; and when you give him a distinction over other people, someone might say to you: ‘This is favouritism.’ So, we say to those who say this: Be more precise, and know that to prefer someone, is to give them a distinction based on wisdom, whilst favouritism means to give someone a distinction based on individual whims and desires. For example, if we want to choose someone for an important job, we choose a number of people who might fit the bill and say, ‘This one is suitable, and this one is suitable, and this one is suitable,’ and ‘this one has distinctions over this one,’ and so on. If we look at them and appraise them with wisdom and aptness, this is preference. But if we choose someone because he is a relative or an in-law of ours, and the like, this is caprice and favouritism.

Preference means to single out and give a distinction but with wisdom; as for favouritism, it is to single out and give a distinction due to a caprice in your soul. For example, suppose that you bought a steam-boat and went in it for a voyage with your young son, along with a steam-boat driver, and your young son wanted to steer the boat, sat in the place of the driver, and began to

steer; but then, tall waves started to come, and the sea became rough; you would quickly get up, take your son out of the way and tell the driver to steer. The boy might cry here; but is this favouritism on your part for the driver? No; for if there was any favouritism, it would be for your son; you preferred the driver for a wise reason based on your knowledge that he knows how to steer better than the young boy. So if you look at the circumstances of the choice and the selection using wisdom, this is preference; whilst favouritism is when caprice is in charge.

Every action of the True Lord *the Most High* is based on wisdom because He has no caprice or desire, and we are all the same to Him; so, when He *the Most High* gives a distinction, or a blessing, or a favour, there is a wise reason for this.

When the True Lord *the Most High* said, ‘...And indeed, you are from among the messengers’ (*al-Baqara*: 252), He then, followed this by saying, ‘Those messengers - some of them We have endowed more highly than others....’, and He gives us an example of this preference by saying, ‘...Among them were those to whom God spoke....’ When you hear the words ‘...Among them were those to whom God spoke...’, what comes directly to mind is Moses *peace be upon him*; and apart from him, God *the Most High* also spoke to the angels.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...and He raised some of them in degree...’, and then He says, ‘...And We gave Jesus, the Son of Mary, clear proofs....’ He *the Exalted* first specified Moses *peace be upon him* with the predominant attribute, saying, ‘to whom God spoke,’ and He also specified our master Jesus *peace be upon him* by saying that He gave him signs and proofs; and between Moses and Jesus *peace be upon them* He said, ‘...and He raised some of them in degree....’ These verses are addressed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, so here, we have words about others directed to someone, namely Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Sometimes a person is mentioned by name or by his predominant attribute so that the intended person has been specified; but other times, a person is mentioned by his attribute, and then, it is left to the intelligence of the listener to connect the attribute to its possessor; so, it is as though it is understood that God’s words ‘...and He raised some of them in degree...’ cannot rightfully be applied to anyone but Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* alone.

God *the Most High* placed him in between Moses and Jesus *peace be upon them* even though the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* did not come between them chronologically, but rather came as the Final Prophet; but you find that His way is the middle way. The Jews went too far with materialism at the expense of spirituality, and the Christians went too far with spirituality at the expense of materialism; but the world needs a middle way between materialism and spirituality, so, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came. It is as though Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the axis of equilibrium in the affairs of existence.

If we want to know the aspects of this preference, we find that there were messengers whom God *the Most High* sent to their villages, such as our master Lot *peace be upon him*, for example, and some messengers were limited in the scope or the life-span of their message; but there is one messenger to whom it was said: You are sent to man and jinn-kind, and to all who will exist of man and jinn-kind until the end of time. This was Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

And if the preference is based on actions, it is also for our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; and if we consider the miracles which God sent to His messengers to prove to the people that they were truly sent by their Lord, we find that all the miracles were miracles of nature, i.e. tangible, physical miracles which are believed by those who see them; for those who saw the staff of Moses *peace be upon him* strike the sea and part it, this was a physical miracle in which the people of Moses *peace be upon him* believed; and those who saw Jesus *peace be upon him* heal the blind and the leprous witnessed the physical miracle and believed in it. But do these miracles still have any existence now, except in the form of reports of them? No, they no longer exist.

But when God *the Most High* wanted to give Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a miracle, He did not send him a miracle in a material form⁽¹⁾ which happens once and then ends. He *the Exalted* sent Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with a Message to remain until the end of time. His message is not limited. Therefore, His miracle had to be based not on matter, but rather on

(1) This said, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* also performed many great physical miracles; see Ibn Taimiya's *Al-Furqan*.

the intellect, for the intellect is something which everyone shares; and therefore, his miracle was the Quran, and everyone is now able to say, ‘Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of God, and this is his miracle.’ The miracle of our Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is something which exists to be seen.

As to the aspect of application of teachings, we find that the messengers did not come to establish laws themselves, but rather, they would deliver laws from God, and they did not have the right to legislate themselves. As for the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, he is the only Messenger whose commands and prohibitions God *the Most High* ordered the believers to obey in commanding them to accept whatever the Messenger gives them and refrain from anything that he forbids them (*al-Hashr*: 7).

So, He *peace and blessings be upon him* was singled out by God with the right to legislate too; is this not a special distinction? The purpose of the Way of Heaven is to establish laws, which govern the lives of God’s vicegerents on earth. And these laws are of two kinds: One kind comes from God, and in this we find that all the messengers are equal; and the second type of laws are those which God *the Most High* left the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to legislate as he saw fit, and this was a special preference for the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*.

So, when God *the Most High* says, ‘...and He raised some of them in degree...’, this can only mean our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, and this says more than simply mentioning his name could. I will give an example of this – and God is beyond compare: You give one of your sons an ordinary pencil, and you give your second son an expensive pen, and you give your third son a watch, and for your fourth son you buy a very expensive gift. Then you go to the boys and say, ‘I bought so-and-so a pencil and so-and-so an ink pen and I bought so-and-so a watch, and for someone I bought an expensive gift.’ By ‘someone’, it is understood that you mean the fourth son whose name you did not mention, and he has been specified and identified.

‘Those messengers - some of them We have endowed more highly than others. Among them were those to whom God spoke....’ When you say that

God *the Most High* speaks, do not be unmindful of a universal matter which applies to every attribute of God which can also be applied to humans. I speak, and God speaks, but is His speech like mine? If you think that my being is like His Being, then, make my speech like His speech; and if my being is not like His Being, how could my speech be like His speech?

Someone might say that 'speech' is comprised of a voice, and vocal chords, and so on. To him we say: No; you should not understand anything related to God except in the light of the rule that there is nothing like unto Him (*ash-Shura*: 11); and we take every attribute ascribed to God according to what God says, and we do not come up with attributes on our own; and after this we do not compare Him to a human in attribute. God has life, and you have life, but are any of our lives like His life? No; for His life is intrinsic, whilst all of our lives are given to us and taken from us, so, they are not like His life.

The True Lord *the Most High* says that it is He Who created the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them in six days; then, He established (*istawa*) Himself above the Throne. Then, He addresses mankind saying that they have not besides Him any protector or any intercessor; so, will they not be reminded? (*as-Sajda*: 4).

Is the 'sitting' of the True Lord *the Most High* like the sitting of man? Or is the Chair of the Creator like the chair of the creature? Of course not. We believers take every attribute of God according to the principle of *tanzih* (the declaration of God's absolute dissimilarity to all contingent being). Glory be to God, there is nothing like Him; the establishment (*istiwa*) of God is not like the establishment of humans, and the sitting of the True Lord *the Most High* is not like the sitting of man.

Let us give this example – and God *the Most High* is beyond compare: Imagine that a friend of yours invites you to eat at his home, and then one of the leaders of the community invites you to eat at his home. You will certainly find that there is a difference in the quality and variety of the food between the tables of those who have invited you. If there are different degrees between the attributes of human beings themselves according to their situations, abilities, and resources, and if you follow the rising level of attributes to the Creator

of all things, you will see with certainty that He *the Exalted* is far beyond everything other than Himself, and that there is nothing like Him.

So, the expression ‘to whom God spoke’ means that He informed his messenger via any means of passing information. ‘...Among them were those to whom God spoke, and He raised some of them in degree. And We gave Jesus, the Son of Mary, clear proofs, and We supported him with the Holy Spirit....’ The True Lord *the Most High* always confirms, when speaking about our master Jesus *peace be upon him*, that Jesus son of Mary *peace be upon them* was aided by the Holy Spirit; for the things to which our master Jesus *peace be upon him* was exposed, required that the Holy Spirit was always with him, which is why the True Lord *the Most High* states his supplication that *peace be upon him* on the day when he was born, and on the day of his death, and on the day when he shall be raised to life (*Maryam*: 33).

Upon the occasion of his birth, our master Jesus *peace be upon him* was exposed to a problem because he was born in an unconventional way, and his mother was accused because of this; and the Quran absolved her, declared her innocence, and put things in their proper place. Again, he faced a problem in the matter of his death, when they wanted to kill him.

When we look at the messengers, we find that the cause for God *the Most High* sending messengers to the world was that He *the Exalted* did not create mankind in a state of compulsion to act, and nor to be forced as all other creatures in the universe are forced; and directly after man comes animals which are lacking in intelligence; and after animals comes the genus of plants which are lacking in sensation and motion; and after this comes minerals which are lower than vegetables; and these are the genera of existence. Mastery was given to man in that all the other genera are bound to serve him, not by free choice, but by compulsion and subdual.

The sun has never come along and said, ‘Creatures no longer please me, so I will not rise on them today.’ And the wind never refused to blow, nor did the rain refuse to fall, nor did the earth refuse to give plants their means of sustenance. A man mounts a riding animal, a horse for example, and steers it as he likes and pleases, and nothing ever refuses to obey man. You, O men, are the one species to whom God has given the free choice as to whether to

fulfil your purpose in existence; if you wish, you can do this, and if you wish you can do that.

But God *the Most High* did not leave you like this completely, but rather, there are certain things which occur despite your wishes, and you are compelled as far as they are concerned. You cannot, for example, decide the day you are born, or the day you die, nor the external things which will befall you, nor the activities which take place inside your body; in all of these matters, you are compelled, and you cannot escape the grasp of your Lord; but you have the freedom of choice in other matters.

We know that He *the Exalted* compelled certain genera to be as He wanted, and as He liked; and this is the attribute of Omnipotence, for the attribute of compulsion implies control. If He left one genus to decide whether or not to believe, and, if it believes, to decide whether or not to obey, this proves the love for God *the Most High* of the one who chooses and favours obedience to God over disobedience.

We know that compulsion subdues the body, but it does not subdue the heart. You can threaten someone with a gun and say, 'Prostrate before me,' and he will do so; but you cannot say to him at gunpoint, 'Love me.' The True Lord *the Most High* leaves it for us to choose faith, and leaves it for us to choose obedience or disobedience, so He knows who comes to Him in love, and who comes to Him in compulsion.

The whole world comes to God *the Most High* in compulsion, and in your own body, O man, there are things in which you are compelled. In this way, God's Omnipotence is confirmed, yet love for Him is yet to be confirmed; the righteous servant is the one who obeys Him out of love. We have given the example before – and God is beyond compare – and said that a man might have two servants, one named Sa'd and the other named Sa'id. Sa'd's master ties him with a rope and pulls him along, saying: 'Come along, Sa'd!' Does Sa'd have the option not to come? No; but the master leaves Sa'id to be free, and when he calls him, he comes.

So, which one of them loves his master, the one who comes by the rope, or the one who comes because of love? It is part of the honour of man that he

confirms for God the attribute of love if he believes in Him; for had He *the Exalted* willed to guide all people, none of them would have been able to disbelieve in Him; and had He willed to be obeyed always, no one could ever have disobeyed Him. This is why we said that Satan had knowledge when he said before God *the Most High* that he swears by God's Might that he will most certainly beguile mankind all into grievous error (*Sad*: 82).

Satan swore to God by His Might *the Exalted* over His creatures; it is as though he said: O Lord, if You needed Your servants, I would not be able to take them; but since You have Might over them, if they want to believe, they will believe, and if they do not want to believe, they will not believe; and this is the door from which I will enter. This is why Satan then, excluded some of the servants from this because he would not be able to find any way to reach them with his insinuations: They are those that are truly God's servants (*Sad*: 83).

That is, for those whom God willed to make pure for Himself, Satan will not be able to get near them. So Satan is not engaged in a battle with God, but rather, he is engaged in a battle with us; the True Lord *the Most High* made this clear when he reported Satan in the Quran as saying that he swears by God's Might that he will most certainly beguile mankind all into grievous error, except for those that are truly God's servants (*Sad*: 82-83).

So, if God *the Most High* wanted us all to be obedient, could anyone disobey? They could not. And if He wanted us all to believe, could anyone disbelieve? They could not. Rather, God wanted to leave certain matters and actions open to your free choice because He wants to know who will come to Him willingly, and that the servant remains between fear and hope. This is why the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'If the believer knows the chastisement God has, no one would hope for His paradise; and if the disbeliever knew the Mercy God has, no one would despair of His paradise.'⁽¹⁾

This is why the requirement of higher faith and higher certainty is that you love God for God's own sake: He *the Exalted* sends whatever events to you that He wills, and you continue to love Him so that God shows you off to the angels and the angels would say, 'Lord, he loves You because You have

(1) Narrated by Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayra God be pleased with him

blessed him,' so, He says to them, 'I shall take away My blessings and he will continue to love Me;' and then the True Lord *the Most High* takes away the blessings, but the servant continues to love Him, for he loves God, not His blessings because He *the Exalted* is deserving of being loved for Himself, without considering the blessings He gives us.

So, the True Lord *the Most High* sent the messengers to bear the way of God to those who wish to announce their love to God, to be true vicegerents on earth, and to maintain the soundness of the universe, not corrupt it. We know that maintaining the soundness of something has two degrees: either you leave the sound thing as it is without corrupting it, or you make it even better; so, you do not come to a spring of water which flows forth for the people and block it up, but rather, you leave it in its sound state, if you are not able to improve it. You might be able to improve a spring of water so that instead of people having to wear themselves out by going to the spring and carrying water from it, you might make for them a high pump with a tank to which the water is raised, and lay pipes so that the water is carried to their houses. In this way, you make the sound thing even sounder, and this is the role of vicegerency and cultivation in existence. If you are unable to make a sound thing sounder, spare us the evil of your corruption and leave it as it is, and sit back, as you are a burden on the universe.

If man were honest with the universe, he would ask himself: 'Who was it who was guided to make the bread which we now eat?' He would realise that it took the experiences of all people since Adam *peace be upon him* to arrive at the production of this bread: one person farmed wheat, and another was guided by God to grind this wheat, and He *the Exalted* guided man to make a sieve to separate flour from chaff, and then, He guided him to make the flour into dough until he found a better taste from it. There is no doubt that it so happened one time, that he left a piece of dough and then was distracted from it in some way, and then, returned to find the dough had risen, and then when he baked it, the bread came out tasting even nicer. He *the Exalted* apportioned and guided; otherwise how could this long process have occurred?

Another example: When a person cleans his clothes, and if he considers the actions of all those who came before him in this regard since the time of

Adam *peace be upon him*, he would realise that everyone who existed before him contributed a beneficial stage until they arrived to the electric washing machine which washes for him without much effort on his part. All of these things came to him through acts of guidance from God.

I said once: Why do people cook zucchinis, not cucumbers? This shows that man underwent many experiences in order for him to see that zucchini cooks better than cucumber; in the same way, people cook mallow but not mint even though mint is better than it; this happened because there were accumulated experiences which showed us that mint does not taste nice when it is cooked.

If you look at anything from which you draw benefit today, and appraise the actions which it has gone through from the day it was first made, you will find that the True Lord allotted to every person a task and an area, and they continue to serve you. As long as you have been served by all of these people from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* until this day, you must look and see what you will do for those who will come after you; do not be lazy in life, taking the good of everyone else in existence and giving nothing in return, but rather, you must also give something. Just as you have taken from your environment, you must give something to this environment; and were this not the case, life would never have advanced because the meaning of advancement of life is that one person takes the experience of those who came before him and tries to improve on them, that is, to reap more benefits from less work.

If the people were to appraise the effort of the one who invented the wheel, for example, upon which cars now move, they would have to pray for God's mercy for him for the comfort he gave them; for after man had carried on his shoulders the most he could carry, the one who invented the wheel relieved him of his toil and strain, and allowed him to carry larger quantities and transport them with less effort.

So, you must look at the blessings which you enjoy now, and see all the stages which they went through, and think whether people made it just as it is, or whether they toiled, strained and struggled from the beginning of their existence on earth, and generation after generation, man came to know how to develop these things; and there might have been mistakes at certain stages, so, they had to begin correcting it and improving it, and so on. When you find

that the world has given all these products to you, you must ask yourself what you will give to this world; and in this way, the human chain will continue to advance and remain connected.

The True Lord *the Most High* sends the Messengers and establishes the way of 'Do' and 'Do not' so that people's lives will be upright on this earth; but people are overwhelmed by heedlessness of this way which is why corruptions appear in existence according to the level of this heedlessness. When corruption increases, the True Lord *the Most High* sends a new messenger to remind them of the way of God once again; and when the new messenger comes, some people believe in him and fight with him, and the Messenger is given victory and God's principles become established on earth. Then time passes, and heedlessness comes and divergence occurs; for there are people who adhere to God's way and people who neglect this way; so, divergence occurs and conflicts break out.

If the True Lord *the Most High* wanted the universe to be free of battles between truth and falsehood, He would have made truth ascendant by compulsion. But God gave us free will, and gave us a choice which is why we find that some grow up to be believers, whilst others grow up to be disbelievers, and we find that some are obedient and others disobedient; this is one group, and this is another. Do not understand that the existence of disbelievers or disobedient people on the earth means that they are outside of God's power; no; God is the One Who gave them this choice, and if God had willed to make the people one community, no one would have been able to escape God's will.

In the verse which we are currently examining, the True Lord *the Most High* mentioned the men of great resolve from amongst the messengers: Our master Moses *peace be upon him*, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and our master Jesus *peace be upon him*; and after this He says, '...If God had willed, those [generations] succeeding them would not have fought each other after the clear proofs had come to them. But they differed, and some of them believed and some others disbelieved. And if God had willed, they would not have fought each other, but God does what He wills.'

So, what made the people contend amongst themselves? It was the divergent views of them: they differed, so they contended. But was it not possible for

them to differ without contending? Had this happened, it would have been unanimous assent on corruption to occur. The True Lord *the Most High* does not want this unanimous assent on corruption to occur. If goodness does not govern the affairs of man, at least the constituents of goodness will remain in existence, and someone will come and find the constituents of goodness, and will make them grow.

In times of falsehood, The True Lord *the Most High* does not eliminate the traces of goodness and righteous actions, but rather, He *the Most High* preserves them so that any person who wants goodness can go to them. Goodness might be weak, but God does not eliminate it; for He uses it to give a new incentive for new believers to raise the banner of the truth even if they are weak at the onset. This is why we find that the Noble Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Were it not for servants of God who bow in obeisance, and babies who suckle, and animals which graze, suffering would be poured forth upon you.’⁽¹⁾

The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is alerting us here not to see weak people as a burden and see ourselves as strong just because they are living in our care; rather, they might be the conduit for Divine tenderness and mercy, as the above Hadith indicates.

God *the Most High* withholds suffering from us because of the weak ones among us because there is a kind of goodness in weakness; an element of goodness remains in existence so that if people want to return to guidance, they will find goodness to guide them. So were it not for this contention, corruption would be absolute, and that would mean utter destruction for humanity; but people differed: some of them believed whilst others disbelieved, ‘...And if God had willed, they would not have fought each other....’ That is, they would have remained on one way of disbelief or corruption, ‘...but God does what He wills.’ In contention, as we know, there are self-sacrifices, and sacrifices for the sake of the continuation of heavenly values on earth.

Sacrifice requires that a person gives either his life, or his wealth, which is why it is appropriate here for us to speak about spending which means to

(1) Narrated by At-Tabarani in *Al-Kabir* and Al-Bayhaqi in *As-Sunnan Al-kubra*

give up one's wealth. In the past, the warrior was the one who equipped himself with the necessary supplies for battle, such as his horse, his spear, his sword, and his arrows; so, he had to spend. The True Lord *the Most High* speaks about this because it is included in the matter of the preservation of the element of faith depicted in the heavenly way which the messengers brought in order that this way remains on earth so that people can return to it when they encounter evil or falsehood. He *the Exalted* says:

يَتَّيِبُهَا لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَنْفِقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ يَوْمٌ لَا بَيْعٌ
فِيهِ وَلَا خُلَّةٌ وَلَا شَفْعَةٌ ۗ وَالْكَافِرُونَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ ﴿٢٥٤﴾

You who believe, give from what We have provided for you, before the Day comes when there is no bargaining, no friendship, and no intercession. It is the disbelievers who are wrong [254] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 254)

We know that every call from the True Lord *the Most High* beginning with His words 'O you who have believed...' indicates that what will come after this will be a command of moral responsibility for those who believe in God, not a command to all people, since God *the Most High* does not issue commands to those who do not believe in Him, but only to those who do believe in Him. And those who traverse this barrier and come to have the certainty of faith thereby become worthy of being directly addressed by God; and it is as though they find in this Divine utterance a call them, saying: O you who believe in Me as a Wise, All-Powerful God Who legislates for you: I want you to do this.

So, faith in God *the Most High* is the basis of every ruling; so, why do you do something? Do not say it is because the wisdom behind it is such-and-such, but rather say, 'It is because God, in whom I believe, has commanded me to do these things,' whether you understand the wisdom behind them or not; indeed, for you to obey God's command to you without understanding the wisdom behind it might be a stronger act of faith than for you to obey the command whilst knowing the wisdom behind it.

If a doctor says to someone, 'The alcohol you are drinking is damaging your liver and doing such-and-such to you,' and then, he quits drinking, an act

which happens to have the appearance of obedience to God, but did he quit because God said so? No; he did not quit because God said so, but rather, because the doctor said so; so, his faith in the doctor is greater than his faith in the Lord of the doctor. As for the believer, he says, 'I will not drink alcohol because God has forbidden it; and why would I wait for the doctor to tell me that my liver is being damaged by my drinking?' The true mercy is that the disease never comes .

The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'O you who have believed, spend from that which We have provided for you....' That is: I do not ask you to spend on Me, but rather to spend from what I have granted you as sustenance; for sustenance comes from a person's work, and a person's work requires the power to act on something or some material, and this action comes after a process of thought, and this thought was arranged by the One Who created it; and the limbs which act, and the hand which moves, and the foot which walks, were created by God, and the material upon which you work was created by God. Let us take the farmer as a model: we find that the earth, in which the components exist, was created by God. So a man works with the mind which God created, and acts with the limbs which God created to give him the power to work on the material which God created to give man its goodness; so, which part of this belongs to man then?

Despite this, if man gains any good from all this, He *the Exalted* does not say: It is Mine; but rather, He says: I give it to you, man, but give Me my right from it; and I shall not take My right for Myself, but rather, it is for your needy brother. The True Lord *the Most High* says that He does not want from Jinn and mankind to give Him provision, or to feed Him (*adh-Dhariyat*: 57).

Be careful not to say: What do I have to do with the needy person? You must know that poverty is a contingent, and it is possible for any contingent to befall you yourself. Do not consider yourself to be always giving, but rather consider that something might happen to you that will make you need to take, not to give. The True Lord *the Most High* tells you to give to the poor when you are rich because He tells other people to give to you when you become poor. Respect God's command when it is asked of you so that it will protect you when it is asked of others for you; in this way, there is balance.

Although He is the One Who provides sustenance, He wants you, O servants, to cooperate and love one another so that rancour is wiped from your hearts; for the weak person – one who is naturally weak, not one who deliberately appears weak in order to beg and swindle out of laziness, but rather, one who is unable to work – is the responsibility of the believers, and He *the Most High* makes the strong responsible for aiding you when you are weak.

When you – as a weak and incapacitated person – see that the strong and able have not forgotten you, and that they have remembered to share with you what they have, you realise that you are in a supporting environment which loves goodness for you; and if you see a blessing come to you when you are incapacitated, you will never envy it, and you will not resent the one who gives it to you, but rather, you will hope, as a result of the sweetness of it in your soul – having it come to you in your hour of need –that God will make you able to repay it; and in this way, society will be united in solidarity and cohesion.

When God *the Most High* says, ‘...spend from that which We have provided for you...’, you are not doing God Himself a favour, but rather, you are spending from what He has provided for you; and out of His grace upon you, God respected the fruit of your labours and ascribed it to you so that even when your brother is in need, He *the Exalted* says: Who is it that will lend to God a goodly loan? He will multiply it for him many times over. And it is God who withholds and grants abundance, and to Him you will be returned (*al-Baqara*: 245)

The True Lord *the Most High* considers spending in God’s cause to be a loan from the servant to the Lord, Creator, and Giver of all sustenance. In order for us to understand the meaning of spending, I say: We said before that the Arabic word for spending (*anfaqa*) is derived from the root stem (*n-f-q*), which literally means for a market to finish quickly and for the wares to be sold for their set prices. We know that trade means the exchange of goods for prices, and goods can be directly benefited from where as prices cannot.

When you are hungry, will it avail you to have a mountain of gold? You cannot benefit directly from this mountain of gold while your benefit from a slice of bread is direct; likewise, you benefit directly from a cup filled with water, and the clothes you wear. So the thing you benefit from directly is called a ‘good’ whilst the thing you do not benefit from directly is called a

‘price.’ This is why the True Lord *the Most High* says to us as a warning and admonition for us not to seek pride in wealth: ‘O you who have believed, spend from that which We have provided for you before there comes a Day in which there is no exchange and no friendship and no intercession. And the infidels are indeed the wrongdoers.’

The True Lord *the Most High* urges us to spend from what He grants us as sustenance before the coming of the Last Day, in which there shall be no bargaining, that is, no opportunity to exchange prices for goods or vice versa; and also on that day, there will be no ‘friendship’ (*khulla*), which means sincere love, the relationship which exists between two people so that each one is connected by love to the other; for each of you will be separated from the other even if there was an emotional link between you, and in the Hereafter every person will be concerned solely with the matter of his own soul.

On the Last Day, there will be no selling, or buying, and no friendship, and no intercession; and these are the means of escape which a person can usually resort to. You will not possess any price with which to buy, nor will anyone else have any good to offer in the Hereafter, so, this door will be closed. Likewise, there will be no friendship or intercession; yet, intercession here is permitted if it is from those to whom God has allowed to intercede, so, the matter is in God’s Hand. The meaning of ‘intercessor’ (*shafi*‘) is derived from the word (*shaf*‘), which means ‘even’, as in ‘odd and even’; something odd is basically singular whilst something even is basically dual. It is as though the intercessor adds his voice to my voice because of my deficiency and need before someone. People seek intercession from those who have a high rank in the sight of the one to whom they intercede so that he will do as they ask. But in the Hereafter, these means will not be available, and there will be no bargaining, friendship, or intercession; and if you spend in God’s Way you will protect yourselves from that day, so, take the opportunity now before the day comes when there will be no bargaining, no friendship and no intercession.

These are the gateways to salvation that people think they have, which will be closed on this mighty day; it is as though the True Lord *the Most High* were saying: I did not make a chance pass by My creatures; it is My creatures who have wronged themselves and put themselves in this position, and I have

not wronged them. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by saying, ‘...And the infidels are indeed the wrongdoers.’

After speaking about the messengers, the divergence, the fighting to uphold the Way of the True Lord *the Most High*, and the spending in His cause, God *the Most High* clarifies for us the correct image of faith in whose light, all of these things came; for the entire succession of Divine messages came for the sake of this way. He *the Exalted* says:

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ لَا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَّةٌ وَلَا نَوْمٌ لَهُ مَا فِي
السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ
أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا بِمَا شَاءَ وَسِعَ
كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَلَا يَئُودُهُ حِفْظُهُمَا وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ ﴿٢٥٥﴾

God - there is no god but Him, the Ever Living, the Ever Watchful. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. All that is in the heavens and in the earth belongs to Him. Who is there that can intercede with Him except by His leave? He knows what is before them and what is behind them, but they do not comprehend any of His knowledge except what He wills. His throne extends over the heavens and the earth; it does not weary Him to preserve them both. He is the Most High, the Tremendous [255] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 255)

We shall pause here to reflect on His words: ‘God – there is no deity except Him....’ The word Allah (‘God’) is a proper noun for the Necessary Being, and when you say ‘God’, the mind goes directly to the Necessary Being.

What does the ‘Necessary Being’ mean? Being is of two kinds: The necessary and the possible. The necessary kind of being is that which necessarily must exist – it is inconceivable that he does not exist. When the True Lord *the Most High* told us of His Name ‘Allah’ He gave us the idea that by this name ‘Allah,’ He *the Exalted* challenges anyone but Him to be named by it. Were we all believers, our respect for this challenge would arise from our faith; but there are those who do not believe in God, and there are rebels and atheists who say that ‘God is a superstition;’ yet, does any one of these people dare to call himself ‘Allah’?

No one has done this because God has made this challenge and no one dared to expose himself to this experiment. The fact that the disbelievers and atheists do not dare to undergo this experiment proves that their disbelief is not firmly implanted in their souls; were their disbelief sound, they would say, 'We will take this name and see what happens;' but this has not happened.

So the word 'Allah' is the proper noun for the Necessary Being, to whom are ascribed all the attributes of perfection. After this there comes the fundamental matter, which is: '...there is no deity except Him....' Here we find negation and then affirmation; the negation is 'there is no deity' and the affirmation is 'except Him'. The negation is an act of clearing, and the affirmation is an act of adorning (and clearing of irregularities comes before the affirming of beauty): He *the Exalted* clears for us His existence of any partner to Him, and then affirms to us His Oneness. The expression '...There is no deity except Him...' means nothing has the right to be worshipped except God. We know that some people, during periods of heedlessness, worshipped idols and celestial bodies; but were they true deities, or false ones? They were false deities, and the proof of this matter, which is that 'there is no deity except God', i.e. there is nothing which can be worshipped except God, is that none of these other 'deities' has objected to the truth of this; so, this statement is right and true.

If anyone claims the contrary, we say to him: God has told us that there is nothing which can rightfully be worshipped but Him because He is the One Who created and provided, and said: I am the One Who created; if this is correct, then, He is truthful in what He says and we must not worship anyone but Him; and if this is not correct, and it was someone else who created this universe, then, where is this one who created and then left another who did not create this universe to say, 'I am the One Who created the universe'? It is one of two things: the first is that there is no deity besides Him, in which case the matter is settled; the other is that if there were other deities, and then one came and said 'I am the Deity, and there is no other deity besides Me,' then, where are these other deities? Do they not know that this has happened?

If they do not know about it, then, they are not worthy of being deities; and if they do know about it, why have they not said, 'We are deities, and this is a lie'? Just as God sent messengers with miracles, they, too, should have

sent messengers with miracles. If a person makes a claim and there is no one to dispute it, the claim stands until it is challenged.

So, the expression 'there is no deity except God' has with it the evidence of its truth; for either this statement is right and true, and that is the end of it, or else if it is not true, where is the deity who created, and who should be worshipped, after he heard someone else come and take this matter from him? And after this we do not hear or sense anything from him, and he does not speak, and we know nothing about him; so, what is the matter with him? Either he does not know, or he does not have power, in which case he is not fit to be a deity because if he did know but did not respond, this would mean he had no power. For this reason, our Lord *the Most High* approaches this matter from another angle, commanding His Messenger to proclaim that if there were – as some people say – other deities with Him, surely, they would have to strive to find a way to Him Who is enthroned on His Almightyness. Limitless is He in His Glory, and sublimely, immeasurably exalted above anything that people may say about Him (*al-Isra'*: 42-43).

If these supposed deities had any kind of power, they would have gone to God *the Most High* and denied His Divinity; and if there were any other deity than God, there would be a battle between the two deities, but this has not happened. The statement 'there is no deity except God' is true in its essence even for those who deny it. The evidence of this is the lack of existence of any challenger to this claim. If there is no challenger, then this confirms that there is no deity except God *the Most High*. If a challenger does exist, then, where is he?

I will give an example to illustrate this – and God is beyond compare: Imagine that we are in a meeting, and then we find a wallet and we present it to the attendees, but we do not find its owner. Then someone, who had been with us and left, comes back and says, 'Everyone, when I was sitting with you, I lost my wallet.' Since no one among us claimed it for himself, it must be his wallet.

So, 'there is no deity except God' is something filled with integrity and truth, and God is the Divine Being to whom worship must be directed; and worship is obedience, and a worshipper is one who obeys. Every act of obedience requires a command and a prohibition, and since worship requires commands

and prohibitions, the one to whom these commands and prohibitions are directed must be able to either obey or disobey. So when we say to him, ‘Do this as a way of faith,’ he must be able to refrain from doing it, and when we say to him, ‘Do not do this,’ he must have the ability to do it anyway. If not, and if he were not able to refuse, would He say to him, ‘Do this’? No, He would not say it to him. And if he were unable to comply, would He say to him, ‘Do not do this’? This would not be possible.

A worshipper must be able to do this deed or that and refrain from doing it; if not, commands and prohibitions would be a waste of time and pointless. This is why when they wanted to restrict Islam to the principal canonical acts of worship, namely the dual testimony that there is no god but God, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God, prayer, fasting, the poor-due, and pilgrimage, asking whether this is all that Islam is about, implying that it is a religion which depends on outward actions only, we said to them: No; Islam is concerned with every action in life which befits man’s role as vicegerent on earth; God *the Most High* was the One Who brought people into being out of the earth, and gave them dwelling therein (*Hud*: 61).

The expression ‘made them dwell therein’ means that He instructed them to fill the earth with life; so, every action in life which leads to the earth being filled with life is an act of worship. Do not think that worship is only fasting and prayer because fasting, prayer, and so on are the pillars upon which the motions of life stand, upon which Islam is built. So if you make Islam equal to these pillars alone, you have thereby made Islam a foundation with no building atop it, for these are only the pillars upon which Islam is built. So Islam is everything which befits man’s vicegerency on earth; and this is shown and confirmed by God’s statement that He brought people into being out of the earth, and made them dwell therein (*Hud*: 61).

Some people come to us and say, ‘We need only to worship, and not work.’ We say to any of them: How much of your day does prayer take up? It takes One hour perhaps. And how often is the poor-due taken from you? Once a year; and how much time does fasting take from you? It takes the daylight hours of one month. And does the obligation of the pilgrimage take more from you than one single journey in a lifetime? By God, what will you do

with the rest of your life apart from this, which is so much? You need no more than one hour a day to pray and no more than one day a year to pay the poor-due; you spend one month fasting during the daylight hours, and you perform the pilgrimage once in your lifetime. So what will you do with the rest of the time? You eat, and wear clothes; you will ask for bread to eat, and who will make it for you? This bread goes through many stages before it becomes a morsel which you eat, and it requires more than one science , more than one action and more than one power.

The shop which only sells bread, but does not bake it, requires a window made of glass or the like, and there must be someone working there who goes with his van to the bakery to fetch the bread and take it to the store to sell it. And if you consider the bakery, you will find many stages, from the delivery and receipt of the flour, then, the making of the dough, then, the fire which is fuelled with oil; and this is done by workers who require someone to organise them. And before all this, the flour was just seeds, and then, it was milled into flour; and there were engineers who managed the machines which do this milling, and worked to keep them functioning. And after this, there is the land in which the wheat grew, and how it was ploughed, prepared for farming, irrigated, fertilized, planted, and harvested, and how the ears and the husks were threshed, and then, how it was fanned to spate the grain from the straw, and how the grains were then packed, and so on.

Look at how much effort was required to make the slice of bread you eat, and all the energy, and how many men were required to do it. How could you feel right to let it be made for you, whilst you just sit to pray and fast? No; you must not take the work of others without any effort on your part.

Another example: You wear a robe, but think how much work did this robe require, of spinning, weaving, and stitching? So, do not sit and benefit from the effort of those who work for a living, and say, 'I have been created to worship alone.' This is not worship; worship is to obey God in all that He has commanded, and refrain from all that He has prohibited, according to His statement that He brought people into being out of the earth, and made them dwell therein (*Hud*: 61). Every work is considered an act of worship; otherwise, you will be a burden to others. True faith requires that you benefit from your own work, and not rely on the work of others.

The True Lord *the Most High* made us His vicegerents on earth in order that we thrive upon it, and it is part of good worship that we do all our works well; and in this way, we will not only maintain the pillars of Islam, but we will maintain the pillars and the building too, and we will have fulfilled the responsibility of faith, and all of our actions will have adhered to our testimony that ‘there is no god but God.’

We know that the word ‘God’ (Allah) is a proper noun for the Necessary Being, and this is the Name which God chose for Himself and then, informed us of; and God has many Names, as was narrated to us in the Hadith of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* when He asked God *the Most High* by every Name of His which He revealed in His Book, or which He taught to any of His creatures – that is, taught them exclusively – or which He kept to Himself as part of His knowledge of the Unseen. So do not think that the Names of God *the Most High* amount only to all those Names which are known to us, but rather, these are the Names which God *the Most High* allowed us to know.

It is possible – and from the words of the Hadith we know it to be the case – that God *the Most High* teaches some people some of His Names, and keeps other Names of His to Himself, which we will come to know on the Day of Resurrection when we meet Him. When we speak about the other Names, we find that they are actually adjectives, but they have become names because they are absolute attributes; so, if you say the word *qadir* (‘capable’), you notice that we use this word to describe people; but when we say ‘*Al-Qadir*’, we refer to the fully Capable, namely God. The same is the case with ‘The All-Hearing,’ ‘The All-Seeing,’ and ‘The All Knowing.’

We find that some of the Names of God *the Most High* have opposites, whilst other Beautiful Names of God do not have opposites. If you say ‘The One Who grants life,’ there is also ‘The One Who causes death;’ and there is ‘The Exalter’ and ‘The Humiliator.’ This is because they are attributes whose effects can be seen on others: He causes death to others, and exalts others, and humiliates others. As for the attributes which have no opposites, we term them ‘attributes of the Essence’: He is the Living, and there is no opposite to this; but for ‘The One Who grants life’ we can give the opposite, which is ‘The One Who causes death,’ for the Name drawn from this is the attribute of action. God *the Most High*

can be described by the attributes of action and also by their opposites because they apply to others; but as for the attributes of the Essence, He only is described by them.

When the True Lord *the Most High* said 'Allah,' He wanted to give us some of the manifestations of God in His Names so, He said, 'God— there is no deity except Him...' in order to affirm for us the attribute of Oneness. We must understand that the word 'except' here is not a particle of exclusion because if it were a particle of exclusion, it would be as though you are denying that there are any deities, and then, God is included in the deities which you are denying, and this is incorrect. Rather, what it means is that there was never any deity other than God, and He is One without associate, and nothing is worthy of worship but Him; so, the word 'except' here does not imply exclusion, but rather, it means 'other than', as in 'there is no deity other than God.'

We know that this assertion has its evidence with it; otherwise, if there were another deity, it would have declared to us that it existed. But there is no deity except Him *the Exalted* who told us, 'God— there is no deity except Him....' I liked what Dr 'Abd Al-Wahhab 'Azzam *God rest his soul* said; he was an admirer of the Pakistani poet Iqbal, who used to write poems in the style called *mathani*, which means to give two lines of verse on one subject, and then, to give another two lines on another subject. Most of Iqbal's poetry was concerned with Islamic philosophy and thought, and Dr. 'Abd Al-Wahhab 'Azzam admired Iqbal's poetry, so, he wrote a kind of *mathani* couplet for him, in which he imitated the style of Iqbal, saying:

Monotheism is nothing but positive and negative,

And in these two for the soul are energy and light.

His statement 'monotheism is nothing but positive and negative' alludes to electricity; he says that monotheism is nothing but positive and negative, in which are energy and light for the soul: when you say 'there is no deity,' the words 'there is no' are for negation, and when you complete your words by saying 'but God,' the word 'but' is for affirmation; and Dr. 'Azzam completed his words by saying that 'There is no' and 'But' are an overwhelming power; they are the two electric polarities of the heart, as though electricity comes when

you make a negative and a positive, the positive is ‘but’ and the negative is ‘there is no’ and as long as there is positive and negative, there is an electrical charge.

‘God – there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of [all] existence...’ must be the first attribute of this Deity because capability comes after life, and knowledge comes after life. So every other attribute must come after it in terms of the order they are mentioned; otherwise, no one of God’s attributes is preeminent to, or ahead of, any other, for they are all pre-eternal with no first; for had it ever not existed, how could attributes apply to something non-existent? When we hear the word ‘Ever-Living’, we say, what does ‘living’ mean? The philosophers were uncertain about the explanation of this – one of them saying that a living being is one who has the attribute of being able to perceive if there is something to be perceived.

The philosopher who said this meant by ‘life’, our life, as though beings other than us do not have any perception. We say to the one who has this opinion: No; if you mean life with its comprehensive, exact definition, you must say that life means that a being has an attribute which preserves its ability to fulfil its function; this is what the definition must be. So, a living being is something which has an attribute which preserves its ability to fulfil its function. An example of this is plant; as long as you find it growing, this means it has life which preserves its ability to fulfil its function; if it is cut, this ability ends; another example is man: when he dies, he is no longer in a sound state to fulfil his purpose. When inanimate elements come into contact with one another, they react; this reaction is a branch of the existence of life, but it is a life appropriate to these elements, not like our life.

When you see smooth, slippery pebbles, are they all the same size? No; their forms are different, and this indicates that there are several stages for a single stone of them; and if these stones remained in their natural environment, the large ones would certainly break apart one day and become small, and then become large once again; but when man uses these stones to put, for example, between the rails of train tracks, the stones have been taken from their natural environment. It is out of God’s wisdom that nothing ever loses its usefulness, but rather, He *the Exalted* prepares for everything another function.

Every being has an attribute which preserves its ability to fulfil its function and it has a life which is appropriate to this function. We have not devised these words of our own accord, but rather, we are saying this because we read the Quran with attentiveness and reflection; and we ask: What does the Quran mention as the opposite of life? It is perishing, as can be understood from God'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). The opposite of life is perishing (*halak*), and 'living' means 'not perishing;' and something which has perished cannot be alive. God *the Most High* says about the Hereafter that everything is bound to perish, except His eternal Self (*al-Qasas*: 88).

This means that all genera, from the highest to the lowest, whether man, angel, animal, or vegetable, all will perish. As long as all will perish on the Last Day, it is as though they were not perishing before this, and everything had a life appropriate for it. Is a stone not a thing, and will it not be one of those who perish on the Last Day? So, before this it is not perished; but we humans cannot grasp this, and we understand life to mean only sensation and external movement although scientists have confirmed that even atoms contain within them rotation and have life. When you look through a microscope at a plant leaf, and see all the verdure and the cells on it, and see all the processes taking place on it, you say, 'This life is more advanced than our own life, and more intricate!'

So, everything has life; and do not think that you are the one who causes them to perish. When you take a stone and break it up and put it in an oven to make plaster, do not say that you have taken from the stone its appropriate form of life; you have only changed its function from being hard stone, and it now has a new function. The chain continues until everything in existence has a life which is appropriate for the function which is right for it.

Consider the Life of the True Lord *the Most High*: what is its form? It is the Higher Life, and He is *the Most High* Living Being, such that life can never be taken from Him because no one gave Him life, but rather, His life is intrinsic; and this is the Living Being in its absolute sense.

So, the Living Being in its absolute sense is God, and the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘God – there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living...’, and the effect of this attribute is present in all the other attributes. He then says, ‘...the Sustainer of [all] existence (*al-Qayyous*)....’ The Arabic word *Qayyum* is an intensive adjectival form of the word *qa'im*, which means ‘one who preserves and takes care of something.’ This is like when we say that God is *Ghafour* (‘the Much-Forgiving’), which is the intensive form of *ghafir* (‘forgiving’). Do we not have the simple adjective form *ghafir*? We do, but *ghafour* is the intensive adjectival form.

Someone might say, ‘Are some of God’s attributes strong, and others weak?’ We say: No; God’s attributes cannot be described as having strength or weakness, for God’s attributes are a single unified system. In order for us to understand this, let us give an example – and God *the Most High* is beyond compare: We all eat in order to stay alive, so, we are all ‘eaters’, which in Arabic is *akil*. But if you describe someone with the emphatic form *akoul*, this means that he has taken the attribute of eating, in which we all share, and increased it so that we can describe him with the emphatic forms *akkal* or *akoul*.

What is the nature of this increase? It might be that you normally eat one slice of bread, whilst he eats two or three so that on the occasion of eating, he consumes a lot, so, we call him *akoul*. Or, he might eat a single slice of bread as you do in one meal, but he eats five meals a day instead of three, and in this case, he is also *akoul*. So the emphatic form *akoul* either refers to an emphasis of the action itself, or else a repetition of the action.

We consider God’s attributes and say that they are not subject to strength and weakness in the action itself, but rather in the repetition of the action with respect to all mankind. God *the Most High* is forgiving (*ghafir*) to this one, and to that one, and to every sinner who repents; so, the action is repeated, and He is the Much-Forgiving (*al-Ghafour*) and the All-Forgiving (*al-Ghaffar*). This solves difficulties for us in many situations; when God *the Most High* says that He is never unfair to His servants, He *the Exalted* uses the term *zhallam*, the emphatic form of *zhalim*, (‘unfair’) (*Fussilat*: 46). Here we find a linguistic rule which says that when you use an emphatic adjectival form, and affirm it, the simple adjective form of the same word is also a priori affirmed. For example,

if you say that someone is '*allam* or '*alim* (both meaning 'knowledgeable'), as long as you affirm the stronger adjective, the weaker form is also included. But if you negate the emphatic form, the ordinary form might still apply: he may not be '*allama* ('extremely knowledgeable'), but he might still be '*allam* or '*alim*, ('knowledgeable'). If you say that someone is extremely knowledgeable, you thereby also affirm the lower forms of the adjective, so, he is also a priori knowledgeable in the forms '*allam* and '*alim*. However, if you deny that he is very knowledgeable, have you denied the rest? No; so, the negation of the greater does not necessarily negate the lesser.

But if you affirm the greater, the lesser is also affirmed, and if you negate the greater the lesser is not automatically negated. If you say that God is not *zhallam* ('extremely unfair') to His servants, you have negated the greater: it is true that He is not emphatic in wronging them, but could He possibly be *zhalim* ('unfair') and do them a lesser wrong, according to what we said about the negation of the greater not necessarily negating the lesser? We say: No; because we must consider the principle matter here in light of the fact that the emphasis of an action and a deed sometimes refers to the action itself, and sometimes refers to the repetition of the action. If the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to wrong this person, and that person, the action would be repeated, so, He would be – Far from it! i.e. *zhallam*; this is why He did not say 'extremely unfair to His servant,' but rather said 'extremely unfair to His servants.'

So, one person may be wronged, and then, another, and then, another; and when someone wrongs them all, he is *zhallam*; this is why God *the Most High* negated this by saying that He is never unfair to His servants (*Fussilat*: 46).

The True Lord *the Most High* says here, '...the Sustainer of [all] existence...' (*al-Qayama*) which is an intensive adjectival form of the word *qa'im*, which literally means 'stander, one who stands' or 'one who manages and takes care of something,' as in the one who takes care of the affairs of his house, of his dependants, of a school's affairs, or takes care of management, meaning that he handles its affairs. It is as though caring and being in charge of something is a sign of being in a supervisory position; we do not say in Arabic that someone is the *qa'id* ('sitter, one who sits') of the affairs of something. And when you say *Qayyum*, this means an even greater level of sustaining, caring and supervision;

how so? Because the one who is *qa'im* might be dependent on someone else; but when He is self-subsistent so that others draw their subsistence from Him, this means that He sustains and manages every other being. God *the Most High* puts forth the question as to whom it is that is standing over every soul in what it earns. Yet, the idolaters set up associates with God. Then, God commands His Messenger to tell them to give their associates' names. Or, would they inform God of something that He does not know on earth? Or, is it just outward speech? But their fraudulent speech appeared embellished to the disbelievers, and they were turned away from the path; and He whom God lets go astray, no guide will be there for him (*al-Ra'd*: 33).

The idolaters arrived to the level of stupidity in their obstinacy, ascribing associates to God in their worship. Yet, can anyone reach that high level, the level of the creation of the world and the sustenance of everything in it, whether large or small? He is the Protector and Overseer of every being, and the world with all that is open and hidden within it, and these idols bring neither harm nor benefit; so, how could you doubt, O you who ascribe partners to God, that the True Lord *the Most High* is glorified above this by the fact that He sustains every being and all of creation? But the people of error are deluded by their error, and they have no guide without God.

The True Lord *the Most High* is Self-Subsistent, and He sustains others; if anyone else is subsistent, they only draw their subsistence from Him. So He must be '...the Sustainer of [all] existence...' and part of His subsistence is that '...Neither drowsiness overtakes Him nor sleep....' In the traditional books of scholars, it is narrated that the children of Israel asked Moses *peace be upon him*, 'Does our Lord sleep?'

God inspired him to take two bottles and place them in a man's hand and then let him go to sleep, and he will see the answer. When they put the bottles in his hand and then he slept, the bottles smashed, and then he said, 'This is it.' That is, He sustains the affairs of the sky and the earth, and if drowsiness and sleep were to overtake Him, the world would be destroyed.

So '...Neither drowsiness overtakes Him nor sleep....' The word 'drowsiness' (*sina*) is the first stage of slumber, i.e. light sleep. One of us might be sitting, and then, might doze off. But 'sleep' (*nawm*) means deep sleep; so, when God

said ‘...Neither drowsiness overtakes Him nor sleep...’, they might have said, ‘He can overcome light sleep, but can He fight off deep sleep?’ The True Lord *the Most High* said of Himself, ‘...Neither drowsiness overtakes Him nor sleep....’ We know that slumber is the dozing which comes at the onset of sleep, the signs of which begin with the eyes and the eyelids. When a person begins to fall asleep, this shows first in his eyes, which is why they say that the eye is the body part which allows you to see a person’s states; and in our modern times, they have discovered that the state of the arteries can only be known accurately from the eye. The listlessness which first comes to the eye is slumber, or the beginnings of sleep which we also call ‘drowsiness.’

‘...Neither drowsiness overtakes Him nor sleep....’ Would you want a greater reassurance from the Deity you worship, the God *the Most High* you adore, and the Creator of all creatures, than His saying to the created worshipper: ‘Sleep as much as you need, and relax; for your Lord does not sleep;’ what more would you want? He *the Exalted* knows that He created you, and that you need to sleep, and whilst you are asleep the mechanisms of your body continue to work. When you sleep, does your heart stop? When you sleep, does your breathing stop? When you sleep, does your stomach cease to perform its digestive functions? When you sleep, do your intestines stop absorbing nutrients? No; rather, everything in your machinery continues to do its job. Who would supervise these processes if your Lord were to sleep?

So, you sleep, and He does not sleep; by God, is this servitude which degrades us, or one that exalts us? It is a servitude which exalts us, for the One whom we worship says: Sleep, all of you, for neither drowsiness nor sleep overtakes Me. Do not think that although neither sleep nor drowsiness overtake Him, anything in His universe can escape His will; no; everything in the heavens and the earth belongs to Him, and nothing, and nobody can escape His Omnipotent power; for this reason, the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth....’

He *the Exalted* then says, ‘...Who is it that can intercede with Him except by His permission?...’ He *the Exalted* is clarifying things: I gave you relaxation in this worldly life, and I even allowed the disbeliever to enjoy My favours, and I did not make the means scanty for him, and as long as he strived with those

means, I gave to him, which showed that I have no bias. I said to the means: O means, he, who uses you well, shall take you even if he is a disbeliever in Me. But on the Day of Resurrection, the disbeliever will have nothing but suffering because as long as he worked in his worldly life, and worked well, he took his reward. Beware of thinking, as the idolaters who thought that their idols are their intercessors with God. The True Lord *the Most High* said of them that they worship, as partners with God, things or beings that can neither harm nor benefit them, saying that these are their intercessors with God. Then He *the Exalted* commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask them if they think that they are informing God of anything in the heavens or on earth that He does not know. Limitless is He in His glory, and sublimely exalted above anything to which men may ascribe as partners with Him (*Yunus*: 18).

These people, who lied against God by associating partners with Him, and by adopting false idols which could neither bring them harm nor benefit, say of these idols that they will intercede for them before God in the Hereafter; and the True Lord *the Most High* commanded His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to tell the idolaters, ‘Say to them, O Muhammad: Do you tell God of an associate of whose existence God does not know, neither in heavens nor on earth, whilst He is the Creator of everything in the heavens and the earth, and He *the Exalted* is far above having any associate in His dominion?’

They wanted to annul the notion of monotheism, and ascribe associates to God and say, ‘These associates are the ones who will intercede for us before God.’ So, the True Lord *the Most High* says: No one can intercede before Me unless I have given them leave to intercede. Intercession is not anyone’s right, but rather, it is a gift from God, which is why He says, ‘...Who is it that can intercede with Him except by His permission?...’

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...He knows what is [presently] before them and what will be after them....’ When the scholars turn their attention to the expression ‘...what is [presently] before them and what will be after them...’, they explain to us that what is presently before them (literally ‘between the hands’) is that which is in front of one, and what will be after

them (literally 'behind') is that which lies behind one; and what is in front of a person is directed towards the organ of visual perception, the eye; so it means that which is witnessed. That which is behind one is unseen, and one cannot see it; it is as though the meaning of 'what is between the hands' is that which can be seen, and 'that which is behind' is that which is unseen; so, the expression '...what is [presently] before them and what will be after them...' means that He knows their seen and their unseen affairs. The phrase 'what is presently before them' can also mean something else: we might ask whether what lies open before you is heading towards you, or away from you; if there are people in front of you, are they coming to you or going away from you?

If they are going away from you, they are ahead of you and you are following behind them, and those who are behind you will come after you. That is, the True Lord *the Most High* is telling us that He knows the past and the future. The True Lord *the Most High* knows what is open before them, that is, the visible world they call the 'World of Dominion' ('*alam al-mulk*'), and also what is hidden from them, that is, the Unseen, which they call the 'World of Sovereignty' ('*alam al-malakoot*'). He knows what they can see, and what is hidden from them. As the True Lord *the Most High* says that with Him are the keys to the things that are beyond the reach of a created being's perception: none knows them but He. And He knows all that is on land and in the sea; and not a leaf falls but He knows it; and neither is there a grain in the earth's deep darkness, nor anything living or dead, but is recorded in His clear decree (*al-An'am*: 59).

God *the Most High* has knowledge of all the Unseen, and His knowledge encompasses everything, and nothing escapes His ken; it encompasses things from all sides. '...He knows what is [presently] before them and what will be after them, and they encompass not a thing of His knowledge except for what He wills....' The True Lord knows all there is to be known; and the fact that the True Lord *the Most High* knows does not mean that no one else could know, but the knowledge of human beings is a gift from the Creator to His servants.

When someone says, 'I compose poetry', does this statement prevent anyone else from composing their own poetry? No; he did not say, 'No one composes poetry except me.' God *the Most High* says, '...and they encompass not a thing

of His knowledge except for what He wills...' and 'knowledge' is the attribute which knows things for what they truly are; this is knowledge. God's attribute and His knowledge are too mighty to be encompassed because if they were encompassed they would be limited, and God's perfections cannot be limited. For example, when you see something that amazes you, you say, 'This is God's Power!' Is it God's Power, or something decreed by God's Power? It is decreed by God's Power, i.e. it is the effect of God's Power. And when He says, '...and they encompass not a thing of His knowledge...', this means 'that which He knows.'

The word 'encompass' is very precise rhetorical usage because you might be aware of a fact from one side, but be ignorant of it from other sides. He *the Exalted* clarifies: You cannot encompass the knowledge or Power of God because the meaning of encompassing (*ihata*) is to know everything, like the circumference (*muhit*) of a circle; but this does not prevent us from knowing certain partial things, and we can come to know these by means of the laws of deduction which God has given us: there are premises from which we deduce conclusions. For example, does the student who solves an algebra problem or a geometry exercise have knowledge of the Unseen? No; he takes premises given to him in order to arrive at a conclusion previously known to his teacher. You cannot encompass the knowledge of anything but that which God wills you to encompass: '...and they encompass not a thing of His knowledge except for what He wills....'

God's statement 'except for what He wills' is an allowance from Him *the Exalted* that He will grace His creatures by willing for them to know something of that which He knows; this knowledge was hidden and concealed from them in the secrets of the universe, and then God gave the secret permission to reveal itself. Everything which has been revealed to the human mind was hidden in the knowledge of the Unseen, and was one of God's secrets, and then God gave the secret permission to reveal itself, so, we came to know it by His will. Every secret in the universe has a birth, just like a man has, i.e. it has an appointed time in which to appear, and this appointed time is called the 'birth' of the secret. This secret already existed, and the world was benefitting from it without knowing it. For example, we were benefitting from the law of gravity

before we knew the law of gravity, and likewise we benefitted from relativity without knowing what it was. This is what the True Lord *the Most High* explains to us in another place in the Noble Quran, when He says that He shall make people see His signs in the horizons and within themselves so that it will become clear to them that this revelation (the Quran) is indeed the truth. Is it not enough for them to know that your Lord is Witness to everything? (*Fussilat*: 53).

When He *the Exalted* said that He shall make people see, this means that He *the Exalted* will cause new secrets to be born for us, and this birth is not a bringing into existence, but rather a revealing. This is why people say about scientific secrets, that they are 'new discoveries.' When they say this, they show good manners in dealing with the secrets of the universe, even though many of them are not religious: they say, 'We have discovered such-and-such,' meaning that what they discovered was already present. It is not their intention to have good manners when they say this, but this is simply the way it is. As for the believers, they say, 'God gave permission for this secret to be born.'

His words '...and they encompass not a thing of His knowledge except for what He wills...' imply a clear challenge; even if all of mankind came together, they could not encompass anything without His leave, and this is a challenge to all. When He *the Exalted* wills to make a secret of existence come to light, this secret is born; and the revealing of the secret might be adjacent to the investigations of man, such as the scientist who sits in his laboratory and conducts experiments on elements and reactions, and is thereby led to such-and-such a result. He works hard to know a particular secret, and we do not know anything about his hard work and exertion until the day his secret is uncovered.

He took the preliminary indications which God placed in the universe so that if we pursue them we will reach His secret, just as if we want to have a child we get married so that it will come. And on many occasions, God *the Most High* gave permission for the secret to be born without man's occupying himself with its preliminary indications; the time for the secret to be born came without the scientists having worked on its preliminaries, so, God *the Most High* caused it to come to any inventor as a result of a mistake which he made in one of his experiments.

When we study the history of discoveries, we find that most of them occurred in this way; they came about unexpectedly. There was a scientist studying something, and another fact was revealed to him which had been hidden from us all. The time came for it to be born without any investigation by man, so, God *the Most High* brought it to light in a different way altogether. And sometimes, God gives a scientist who researches the preliminary indications success, and allows him to discover the secret which he is looking for.

So, ‘...and they encompass not a thing of His knowledge except for what He wills...’ means that man might come upon the secret by researching it, and sometimes the secret is uncovered in the process of an investigation into something else altogether. God does not withhold the discovery of the secret even if they were not looking for it so that we call it an ‘accident’. Everything that takes place in the universe does so according to a fixed decree, and this is what gives us the difference between knowledge of the Unseen which already existed and had preliminary indications in God’s universe by means of which we could arrive to it, and something which is concealed by God and has no preliminary indications; if He *the Exalted* wills, He gives it from His grace, out of generosity, not as the result of any effort from man; He *the Exalted* gives it as an ‘accident’ in one case, and gives it for things which have no preliminaries to some of His creatures whom He elects, in order that all people know that God gives graces to some of His servants whom He has chosen for His love, His illuminations, and His manifestations.

But does this mean that we can know all of the Unseen? No, because the Unseen is of two kinds: The first is the Unseen for which God places preliminary indications in His universe, which if we follow, will lead us to it, such as is the case with many discoveries; and if God wills for a secret to be born without our having searched for it, He gives it to us ‘accidentally’ from His generous grace, not through our efforts. There is another kind of Unseen which has no preliminary indications, and this is what God *the Most High* has kept within His own knowledge, although He might divulge it to some of His creatures, as He says that He alone knows the Unseen, and He discloses nothing of this Unseen except to a messenger whom He has been pleased to elect; and then, He sends forth a guard to watch over him in whatever lies open before him and in what is before him (*al-Jinn*: 26-27).

God *the Most High* is the Knower of the Unseen, and He does not allow any of His creatures to know His Unseen save those human beings whom He elects and chooses. For this reason, no one can learn this kind of Unseen, and so no one ever opened up a shop for knowledge of the Unseen, where people could go to ask them about unseen matters. The True Lord *the Most High* says that with Him are the keys to the things that are beyond the reach of a created being's perception: none knows them but He. And He knows all that is on land and in the sea; and not a leaf falls but He knows it; and neither is there a grain in the earth's deep darkness, nor anything living or dead, but is recorded in His clear decree (*al-An'am*: 59).

He *the Exalted* does not give this key to any of His creatures. God *the Most High* might want to grant a favour to someone, so, He puts words into their mouth which they might not understand themselves, whereupon the one who hears these words and benefits from them says, 'So-and-so said this to me, how incredible!' This is a grace from God to His servant so that God *the Most High* can show us that He provides His support to these righteous servants.

When God *the Most High* says, '...and they encompass not a thing...' we know that the word 'a thing' means the slightest amount. And His words '...of His knowledge except for what He wills. His *Kursi* (Seat) extends over the heavens and the earth...' teach us about those things which the True Lord *the Most High* ascribes to Himself and are also possessed by His creatures in their own way, such as existence – He *the Exalted* exists, and you exist, and like wealth – He is Rich, and you are rich, and like knowledge – He knows, and you know; but do we say that the attribute for God *the Most High* is like the attribute for us? No. Likewise, everything mentioned about the Unseen in connection with God, whether as an attribution or a description, must not be understood according to how it applies to yourself, but rather must be taken according to the rule that there is nothing like Him (*ash-Shura*: 11).

So, if it is said that God *the Most High* has a 'Hand', He has a Hand just as He has existence; and just as His existence is not like my existence, His Hand is not like my hand, but rather, I understand it according to 'there is nothing like Him.' So, when He says 'His seat extends...' we say: He said this, and as long as He said it we will understand these words according to 'There is nothing like

Him'. Do not say that He has a chair, and He will sit upon it like we do. Do not say so. We have found people who say, 'Where is God? When did He come into being?', and we said and still say: 'When' and 'where' do not apply to God, but rather, they apply to you. Why? That is because 'when' refers to time, and 'where' to place, and time and place are settings for contingent actions, so, only contingent beings have time and place. For example, if I say, 'I drank', as long as the drinking occurred, it had a time and place; but suppose that I did not drink: would there be any time and place? No. So as long as God is not contingent, neither time nor place applies to Him; for time and place came into existence when God created and made this universe. Do not say 'when' because 'when' was created by Him; and do not say 'where' because 'where' was created by Him, and as 'when' and 'where' are adverbial circumstances, one for time and the other for place, and as time and place are aspects of contingent actions; then, when an action occurs, you can speak of time and place.

So, as long as God *the Most High* is not contingent, beware of saying about Him 'when' or 'where' because 'when' and 'where' indicate products of contingent action. We must take God's words '...His *Kursi* (Seat) extends...' as we said, according to 'There is nothing like Him'. Linguistically, the Arabic word for 'seat' (*kursi*) is derived from the word *kirs* which means 'to come together', from which also is derived the word *kurrasa* which means 'booklet', a number of pages brought together. The word *kursi* can be used lexically to mean the foundation upon which something is built. So the root of *kursi*, the letters (*k-r-s*), indicate the notions of coming together and the foundation upon which things are laid firmly; you can tell someone to build a foundational (*kursi*) wall, it means a wall which will be a base to be built upon. The word can also be used to mean the knowledgeable people who resolve problematic circumstances; an Arab poet said, 'They are the *karasi* when misfortunes descend,' meaning that their help is sought out when difficult matters occur.

When any of this is ascribed to the True Lord *the Most High*, the early Muslim scholars had one way of dealing with it, whilst the later scholars had another way. The early scholars would say, 'We understand it just as God said it, but we place the 'how' of it and the envisaging of it in the light of '...There is nothing like Him...' (*ash-Shura*: 11). And some of them said, 'We should

interpret it according to one of God's affirmed attributes,' like the manner they affirm the Omnipotent Power of the True Lord *the Most High* with respect to His expression: '...the Hand of God is over their hands...' (*al-Fath*: 10), that is, His Power is above their power, and as He *the Exalted* said about His own Power of creation that it is He Who has built the sky with His Hands; and, surely, it is He Who is steadily expanding it (*adh-Dhariyat*: 47).

The perfection of God's Omnipotent Power governed the creation of the sky, and the True Lord *the Most High* is sanctified and glorified far beyond any created being's envisaging the word 'Hand' with relation to God. We say that God said this, and we accept it from God because He knows best about His own Essence and His own Self, and we understand it according to the principle that He could have no likeness or counterpart, just as we affirm that God possesses many attributes the like of which are also possessed by God's creatures, and yet, we say that His knowledge is not like our knowledge, and His sight is not like our sight; so, why should His seat be like our seat? The whole thing is covered by the rule '...there is nothing like Him...' (*ash-Shura*: 11).

Scholars say the seat is that which is used for support: so, could the 'seat' here mean His knowledge? Yes. And could it mean His Authority and His Power? Yes, it could because the word 'seat' indicates that it is sat upon; and a person does not sit down from standing unless things are being done and settled for him, which is why they speak of the 'throne (*kursi*) of sovereignty;' this is because when things require standing and work, it means that you cannot sit on a chair, and when you sit on a chair, this means that things are settled and being done for you; and so for God, it means authority, control, supremacy and power.

Or, we could say that since He said, '...His seat extends over the heavens and the earth...' for something to 'extend over' something else means that it is well able to handle it and deal with it; and we understand that the 'heavens and the earth' are enormous beings from our perspective. He *the Exalted* says that greater indeed than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the earth; yet, most people do not understand (*Ghafir*: 57).

So, when He says that the seat overspreads the heavens and the earth, this means that it is greater than the heavens and the earth, that is, they are included in

its vastness. In relation to this, Abu Dharr Al-Ghifari *God be pleased with him* relates: 'I asked the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* about the Seat, and he said, 'O Abu Dharr, the seven heavens and the seven earths are naught, next to the Seat, but as a ring cast into an open expanse; and the superiority of the Throne over the Seat is like the superiority of the expanse over that ring.'⁽¹⁾

After all the scientific advances which mankind has attained, they have only reached the moon, which is nothing but a satellite of the earth, mere light-seconds away from us. In our lives, we have become used to using units of miles and kilometres to measure large lengths and distances, but we discovered that single units are no use for measuring the distance between the stars; for we know, for example, that the sun is 93 million miles away from the earth, but if we want to measure the distance between us and another star, we will be forced to use a number followed by many zeros, and this makes the expression impractical. For this reason, scientists gave celestial bodies an appropriate unit to measure the distance between stars, which we call light years. We know that the speed of light is around three hundred thousand kilometres a second, so, measuring the distance between us and any star in the sky requires very precise calculations and the study of several sciences.

Between the sun and us there are 93 million miles, and its light takes eight and one-third minutes to reach us. In addition, the light of Sirius, the brightest star in the sky, takes nine light years to reach us. So a light year is a unit for measuring the distances of celestial bodies, and we are amazed when we find that the light of some stars takes fifty light years to reach us. All of this, yet we have not even reached the limit of this planet's sky; so, what about the other skies? The limits of God's dominion are beyond our envisaging; and so we can recognise the honour granted by the True Lord *the Most High* to the believers when He *the Exalted* tells of the immensity of paradise by commanding the believers to vie with one another in seeking to attain their Lord's forgiveness and to a paradise as broad as the heavens and the earth, which has been readied for those who have believed in God and His messengers; such is the bounty of God which He grants to whomever He wills – for God's bounty is immense (*al-Hadid*: 21).

(1) *A noble Hadith narrated by Ibn Jarir and Abu Ash-Sheikh in Al-'Azama*

This is paradise which God *the Most High* has prepared for the believers in God and His messengers who race to seek God's forgiveness. If the breadth of paradise is as vast as the heavens and the earth, then what about how vast its length is. What are its dimensions? As we know, breadth is the shorter of the two dimensions.

So, we must understand that there are other worlds besides the sky and the earth, but our eyes can only see what part of the sky and the earth which the True Lord *the Most High* wants us to see. This is why when we hear the True Lord's words '...His seat extends over the heavens and the earth...' we can imagine the magnificence of the seat of Him who is full of Bounty and Majesty.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...His seat extends over the heavens and the earth, and their preservation tires Him not....' If something tires one, this means it is heavy for him; in order for us to understand this, imagine that a man can lift ten kilograms: if we increase his load to twenty kilograms, it will be too heavy for him, and he will have to bend his back in order to bear this weight. If we increase the load any more, the man might fall to the ground because of the excessive heaviness of the load.

So, the meaning of '...and their preservation tires Him not...' is that it is not heavy for God to uphold the heavens and the earth. The sky and the earth, which cannot even be seen by mankind, are overspread by the Divine Seat; some of the exegetes say: If it is not difficult for the seat to uphold the heavens and the earth, then what about the Lord of the seat?

The True Lord *the Most High* gives us an assurance saying that indeed He holds fast the heavens and the earth lest they cease to function properly; and if they cease to function properly, no one could be able to hold them back but He; He is ever Clement, Forgiving (*Fatir*: 41).

The True Lord *the Most High* Alone is the One Who upholds the heavens and the earth in an amazing and remarkable balance; and were they destined to fall, no one could uphold them if God did not, that is, no one would be able to grasp them; for they are upheld by the power of the Invincible One, and if God wanted them to fall, no one would be able to grasp them and stop them from falling.

If these huge things are of God's creation and He is above them, when He describes Himself as being Exalted and Great, this is something natural;

so, the True Lord *the Most High* then, gives us a logical conclusion which is suggested by everything mentioned in this verse, the verse of the Seat (*Ayat Al-Kursi*), saying, ‘...And He is *the Most High*, the Most Great.’ The word ‘High’ (*‘aliyy*) is in Arabic an intensive adjectival form of the attribute (*‘uluw*) which means ‘height.’ The ‘Most High’ is then, the One above whom there is nothing higher, so, everything is lower than He is.

The noble verse which we are currently examining is known to us as *Ayat Al-Kursi* (‘the Verse of the Seat’) because the word *Kursi* (‘seat’) stands out in it; and the word ‘seat’ here means authority, control, power and sovereignty, all of which are attributes of the True Lord *the Most High*. There is no deity except Him, and He is the Ever-Living, and the Sustainer of All being, and He is the One Who neither sleep and nor drowsiness overtakes. To intercede with Him is permitted only by His Will alone, not by the will of any other; And He is the All Knowing of everything whose seat extends over the heavens and the earth; and He is the Exalted, so, there is no one higher than Him, and He is The Most Great, with absolute might. All of these attributes come together to place before us the essentials of the envisagement of faithful doctrine. Many Hadiths have been narrated about this verse from which we can gather that it is a verse with a special rank and status with God. It is narrated that Abu Hurayra *God be pleased with him* related: ‘The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* charged me with the job of looking after the *zakat* (alms) collected in *Ramadan*. Someone came and began to take from the food, so, I took hold of him and said, ‘By God, I will take you to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*!’ He said, ‘I am needy, I have dependants, and I am in dire need.’ So, I let him go, and the next day the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said to me, ‘O Abu Hurayra, what did your captive do yesterday?’ I said, ‘O Messenger of God, he complained of being in dire need and having dependants, so, I had mercy on him and let him go his way.’ He said, ‘Yet he lied to you, and will be back.’ I knew that he would come back because the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had said he would, so, I kept my eye out for him, and he came and started taking from the food. I took hold of him and said, ‘I will take you to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*!’ He said, ‘Leave me, for I am needy, and have dependants, and I will not come back again.’ So, I had mercy on him and let him go his way,

and the next day the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said to me. 'O Abu Hurayra, what did your captive do?' I said, 'O Messenger of God, he complained of being in dire need and having dependants, so, I had mercy on him and let him go his way.' He said: 'Yet he lied to you, and he will be back.' So I kept my eye out for him a third time, and he did come and started taking from the food again. I took hold of him and said, 'I will take you to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*! This is the third and final time you will claim not to return!' He said, 'Let me teach you some words by means of which God will benefit you.' I said, 'What are they?' He said, 'When you go to bed, read the Verse of the Seat, 'God – there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of [all] existence....' until you finish the verse; for it will remain as a protector for you from God, and no demon will approach you until you wake the next morning.' So, I let him go, and the next day the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* asked me, 'What did your captive do yesterday?' I said, 'O Messenger of God, he claimed he would teach me words by means of which God would benefit me, so, I let him go his way.' He said: 'What were they?' I said: 'He said to me: "When you go to bed, read the verse of the Seat from the beginning to the end, 'God – there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of [all] existence....'" and he said: "It will remain as a protector for you from God, and no demon will approach you until you wake the next morning."' (The Prophet's Companions were extremely eager to learn good things.) The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said then, 'Indeed he has told you the truth, though he is usually a liar; do you know to whom you have been speaking these last three nights, O Abu Hurayra?' He said, 'No.' He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'It was Satan.'⁽¹⁾

Abu Hurayra *God be pleased with him* also narrated that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The chapter of *al-Baqara* contains a verse which is the mistress of the verses of the Quran; if it is recited in a house which lodges a demon, it will certainly go out of it: the verse of the Seat.'⁽²⁾

(1) Narrated in *Al-Bukhari's Sahih*, in *Kitab Fada'il Al-Quran*), and in *Kitab Al-Wikala*, and in *Sifat Iblis*

(2) Narrated by Abu 'Abdullah Al-Hakim in his *Mustadrak*

And Abu Umama *God be pleased with him* narrated that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Whoever recites the verse of the Seat after every prayer, there is nothing between him and his entrance into paradise except death.’⁽¹⁾

And Imam 'Ali *God be pleased with him* narrated that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Whoever recites it (the Verse of the Seat) when he goes to bed, God Almighty will protect his household, and the household of his neighbour, and the people of the households around him.’⁽²⁾

All of these things have been related about the merits of this noble verse; and scholars have devoted much time to studying the secret of this matter, and one of them said: Look at the Names of God which are found in it.

And indeed one of the scholars counted all the Beautiful Names of God in it, and found that there are sixteen Names of God in it. Another said that there are seventeen Beautiful Names of God in it, and another said that there are twenty-one Names of God in it. All this was in order for them to derive things from the verse, and know the many virtues of this noble verse. Those who said that it contains sixteen Names of God explained this thus:

It contains the proper noun for the Necessary Being: ‘God’; and the pronoun ‘Him’ in ‘...there is no deity except Him...’ is the second Name; and ‘The Ever-Living’ is the third Name; and ‘...the Sustainer of [all] existence...’ is the fourth Name; and when we look at the True Lord’s words ‘...Neither drowsiness overtakes Him nor sleep...’ we find that the pronoun in ‘overtakes Him’ refers to God Himself *the Exalted*; and ‘...To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth...’ also contains a pronoun referring to Him *the Exalted*. Likewise, the pronouns in His words ‘with Him’, ‘His permission’, ‘He knows’, ‘His knowledge’, ‘He wills’, and ‘His seat’ all refer to Him *the Exalted*; and ‘...their preservation tires Him not...’ also contains a pronoun referring to Him; and the pronoun ‘He’ in His words ‘...And He is *the Most High*, the Most Great’ is also one of His Names; and ‘Most High’ is one of His Names; and ‘Most Great’ is also one of His Names.

(1) Narrated by An-Nasa’i in *Alf-Yawm wa Al-layla* and by Ibn Hibban in his *Sahih*

(2) Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in *Shu’ab Al-Iman*

But another scholar said that there are seventeen Names of God here because in the previous enumeration you did not count the pronoun implied in the gerund from which a verb can be derived when He says 'their preservation': the pronoun 'their' refers to the heavens and the earth, and 'preservation' is a gerund; who is it that preserves the heavens and the earth? It is God *the Most High*. In this way, there are seventeen Beautiful Names of God in the verse of the Seat. A third scholar said: No; you have left out other Names because in the noble verse, there are obvious Names of the True Lord *the Most High*, and there are also names derived from verbs. For example: 'God – there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living (is He), the Sustainer of [all] existence (is He)... Most High (is He), Most Great (is He).'

But other scholars answered this by saying: It is true that these are names derived from verbs, but they have become proper nouns. What is important is that in the verse of the Seat, there are sixteen Divine Names, and if we also count the elided pronoun in 'their preservation' there are seventeen, and if we also count the pronouns implied by the names derived from verbs thus: '...the Ever-Living (is He), the Sustainer of [all] existence (is He)... Most High (is He), Most Great (is He)' this means that the Beautiful Names of God found in this noble verse are twenty-one in number. So this verse has gathered a large number of Divine Names, and this is the source of its greatness.

This noble verse explains and elucidates the fundamentals of the concept of faith, and it produced a complete doctrine, such that the believer can be proud that it is his doctrine. In essence, the verse contains the frame work of faith: As long as there is no deity except God, and as long as He is the Ever-Living, Sustainer of all existence and all the affairs of the heavens and earth, and everything is in His Hand, and He is *the Most High* and Most Great, all of which are reasons for us to believe in Him *the Exalted*, and to exult in that we hold to these doctrines; and they are a reason for the believer to be proud of this religion in which the matter of Absolute Divinity is so clear and plain.

Because of this, it is natural that the True Lord *the Most High* would not coerce anyone to believe in Him unwillingly; for the one who coerces someone to believe in a doctrine is the first one who is certain that were it not for this

coercion, no one would believe this doctrine. In our daily lives, we find that those who hold to false principles are those who hold whips to force people to act according to these principles. All of those who promulgate these false principles know fully well that were they to leave aside the whip and the coercion, no one would follow these false principles. If any one of these promulgators of false principles truly believed that they were sound, he would say: I will present these principles up to the people, and leave the decision for them; because in this case, he would be sure of his principles. As for the one who forces people with the whip, or sovereign power to believe in something, he is the first one who doubts this belief, and the first one who knows that it is false. We see that when such people become too weak to use the whip, or sovereign power, their principles collapse and disintegrate.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ ۚ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ ۚ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمَرْ
بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا ۗ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٥٦﴾

There is no compulsion in religion: true guidance has become distinct from error, so whoever rejects false gods and believes in God has grasped the firmest hand-hold, one that will never break. God is all hearing and all knowing [256]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 256)

The True Lord *the Most High* clarifies for us, believing servants and for all mankind, that ‘There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion....’ Compulsion means to force someone to do something which he does not think it would be good to do; that is, the coerced person does not see any good in the act which would motivate him to do it.

But there are things which we might do with those around us for their own good, such as making children revise their studies, which is something good for the children, or such as forcing sick children to take medicine. These things are not samples of compulsion, but rather, they are ways in which we do what is best for those around us because no one wants to remain ill.

Compulsion, rather, means to force someone to do something, which they do not believe to be good based on the reasoning of their sound mind. For this reason, the True Lord *the Most High* says, 'There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion....' The meaning of this verse is that God did not compel His creatures – and He is their Creator – to have religion; and it was possible for God to compel the free human being just as He compelled the heavens, the earth, the animals, the plants and the minerals, and then no one would have been able to disobey His commands, as He *the Exalted* says that had He so willed, He would indeed have guided all mankind aright (*ar-Ra'd*: 31).

But the True Lord *the Most High* wants to know who will come to Him freely out of love, not out of compulsion. For them to come to Him out of compulsion would affirm His compelling power, but not that He is Beloved; but if someone goes to Him willingly whilst able to choose not to, this proves that there is love. He therefore, says, 'There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion...', that is: I have not established the principle of compulsion in dealing with My servants; and had I willed, everyone on earth would have believed. Were the messengers whom He sent, meant to coerce the people? No; the messengers came to deliver God's Message not to coerce the people. He *the Exalted* gave man free will; otherwise, had He coerced them, He would not have sent messengers to them. This is why the Lord *the Most High* addressed His Messenger saying that had the Lord so willed, all those who live on earth would surely have believed, all of them; would he then, think that he could compel people to believe (*Yunus*: 99).

The mission of the messenger is to deliver God's message because God does not want His creatures to be coerced into following religion; so, the one who delivers God's message does not force His creatures to follow the religion. But there is a subtle point here: there is a difference between compelling someone to embrace a religion and enforcing the requirements of a religion; and this is where the difference occurs.

You ask a Muslim why he does not pray, and he replies, 'There shall be no compulsion in ... religion...', and in this, he supposes that he is cultured and quotes this verse to you to silence you. So say to him: No. you have misunderstood the

verse. ‘There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion...’ means that there is no compulsion concerning doctrine and belief, but once you believe and declare that you believe in God, and you are a Muslim alongside us, you must know that if you break any of the laws of Islam, we have the right to ask you to adhere to it. You are free to believe or not to believe, but once you believe, you have a responsibility to fulfil the requirements of faith; otherwise, your behaviour will be presumed by others to be the behaviour of Islam. If you drink wine, you are free to do so because you are a disbeliever, for example; but will you believe and then drink wine?! No. If you do so, you thereby break one of God’s laws, and you must be penalized.

And since you know, as a sane adult, the requirements of Islam, you must fulfil these requirements. This is why God does not hold a person morally responsible until his mind matures when he reaches adulthood so that it could not be said that God has held someone accountable for faith and charged him with it before his mind has fully developed. Rather, He left moral responsibility until a person has matured and fully developed so that once he enters the sphere of moral responsibility he knows its requirements; and he is free to enter faith or not to do so, but once he enters, he will be held accountable.

No one should say when they hear one of the rulings of this religion, ‘There shall be no compulsion in... religion...’ because this verse was revealed concerning the fundamental matter of doctrine; once you accept this doctrine, it is binding upon you that you fulfil its requirements.

The enemies of Islam wanted to escalate this matter, so they said deceitfully and untruthfully that ‘Islam was spread by the sword.’ We say to them: God *the Most High* willed Islam to develop in a state of weakness, and for the early adherents to it to be oppressed with all manners of oppression, tortured, and banished from their homelands, their wealth, and their families, and for them to be unable to do anything; so the period of weakness which Islam first underwent was intended by Providence. We say to them also: Who was it that forced and compelled the first one ever to raise a sword to do so? The Muslims were weak and overpowered, unable to defend themselves. You are guilty of contradictions when you say that Islam was spread by the

sword, and then you speak about the non-Muslim poll-tax negatively. We say: And what is this poll-tax which Islam takes from the non-Muslims in exchange for defending them? The Muslims would collect the poll-tax in the countries which were conquered by Islam, which shows that some people kept their old religions. As long as there were people who kept their old religions, this proves that Islam was not forced upon anyone.

The reason behind God's words 'There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion...' is that the right way is clearly distinct from error; as long as the matter is distinct, there will be no coercion because coercion comes at moments of ambiguity, and there is no ambiguity. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...The right course has become clear from the wrong....' As long as the right way is distinct from error, there is no coercion. Rather, God *the Most High* gives you proofs, and with your reason, O man, you can decide so that you know that if you enter the religion you must adhere to it, and you will be held accountable for your having entered the religion; so, do not enter it unless you believe and you are sure that it is the truth because part of accepting it is to accept the rulings to which the religion holds you.

'There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion: The right course has become clear from the wrong....' The 'right course' means the way of salvation, and 'wrong' means the way of damnation. The True Lord *the Most High* says in another verse of the Noble Quran, by way of clarifying the right way and the way of error, that he will cause to turn away from His signs all those who, without any right, behave haughtily on earth, and when they see any sign of the truth, they do not believe in it, and when they see the path of rectitude, they do not choose to follow it, and when they see the path of error, they take it for their own; this is because they have given the lie to God's signs and have remained heedless of them (*al-A'raf*: 146).

The True Lord *the Most High* tells us that those who are unjustly arrogant on earth will not be able to find success in seeing God's signs and the proofs of His power; and even if they see the right way, they will not follow it, whilst if they see the way of error, they will follow it because they give the lie to the signs of the Most Merciful, and are heedless of them.

Error (*ghayy*) also means to lose the way, so, when a person is travelling in the desert and loses the way, it is said that he has ‘erred’ (*ghawa*), that is, he has lost the right direction in which to travel, and he might therefore be exposed to all kinds of dangers such as encountering wild beasts and so on. The True Lord *the Most High* also explains the right way to us in a different direction in another verse, reporting the saying of the jinn that they do not know whether evil fortune is intended for those who live on earth, or whether it is their Lord’s will to give them knowledge of what is right (*al-Jinn*: 10).

The jinn thought, as some men did, that God would not raise anyone after death, and would not send any messengers from amongst men to guide the world. The jinn attempted to reach the sky and found there angelic guards and burning flames; and the jinn did not know the secret of the guarding of the sky, and whether this meant evil for mankind or whether God wanted goodness and guidance for them. So both the words *rushd*, (‘the right course’) and *rashad*, (‘consciousness of what is right’) clarify the way which leads to salvation; and the opposite of the right course is error.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says, ‘...So whoever disbelieves in *Taghoot* (the force of evil) and believes in God has indeed grasped the most trustworthy handhold....’ First of all, we notice here that the True Lord *the Most High* mentions first the rejection of evil powers, and then mentions belief in God; this is because what is required is purification first, and then adornment second. A person must first purify himself from the powers of evil so that he does not enter the faith, whilst in a state where he believes in God *the Most High*, but also has the powers of evil in his heart. Before we iron clothes, we wash them and clean them: purification before adornment.

What is ‘the force of evil’ (*At-taghoot*)? The word is derived from the root *tagha*, and the word *taghoot* is an intensive adjective form of (*tughyan*) which means ‘tyranny’; He did not say *taghi* which is the ordinary adjectival form, but rather said *taghoot* which is an intensive form like *jabaroot* which means extreme power. The ‘force of evil’ may refer either to Satan, or to those who give themselves the right to make laws, who declare others to be disbelievers and ascribe faith to whomever they desire according to their caprices, and give things away by the temporal power they possess; and it may also refer to sorcerers and

impostors, and also to all who transgress and go to extremes in any way. The word *taghoot* is an intensive adjectival form, and this intensiveness might take many forms; sometimes the evil force might be a demon, other times a priest, other times a sorcerer, or impostor, and still other times a ruler.

The form of *taghoot* indicates that the one described by this word goes further in his tyranny when he is obeyed; when he tries you out with something small and you obey him, this obedience makes him increase his tyranny over you. The True Lord *the Most High* says about Pharaoh that he incited his people to levity and they obeyed him; surely, they were a depraved people (*az-Zukhruf*: 54).

He goes further in this way until he becomes a tyrant. No one ever starts right away with high tyranny, but rather, they start off one step at a time, like any despotic dictatorial regime: it starts off with something slight, and if the people accept this, the regime becomes harder and harder until it becomes tyrannical (*taghoot*). So a *taghoot* is someone whose tyranny increases the more he is obeyed. It can refer to Satan because he is the origin of evil, and to those who speak in the name of religion in order to gain temporal power (whether they are priests or others), and to those who practise sorcery and trickery because they use their knowledge for evil ends, and they use things to wear down people. The word here is in the intensive adjectival form because it incorporates all these meanings; and if we examine the use of the word in the Quran, we find that the word *taghoot* is sometimes in the masculine Arabic form, and is given in the feminine form in one single verse of the Quran where God *the Most High* speaks of those who shun the force of evil lest they be drawn to worship her, and turn unto God instead, theirs is the glad tidings. Give, then, the glad tidings to My servants (*az-Zumar*: 17).

This verse explains that they abandon all forms and types of evil; that is, those who avoid all the different kinds of evil are those who direct their worship solely to God, and glad tidings are theirs. '...So whoever disbelieves in *Taghoot* (the force of evil) and believes in God has indeed grasped the most trustworthy handhold...' The word 'grasped' is not the same as 'to hold' because 'to grasp' indicates that there is a strong effort made to hold. The religious person needs to make great effort to hold to his religion because Satan will not leave him; so, it is not enough to just hold on, but

rather, you must actively grasp. Every time Satan whispers something to you, you must grasp your religion; and this shows us that there is a strong effort and a firm grasping.

In the expression ‘...has indeed grasped the most trustworthy handhold...’ the word ‘*urwa*, (rendered here as ‘handhold’), literally means a hanging rope, like that of a bucket in a well which you hold onto, and it is usually made from a tightly-coiled rope; and ‘most trustworthy’ (*wuthqa*) means that which you trust will hold firm; so, His words ‘...has indeed grasped the most trustworthy handhold...’ may be an allegory based on the rope of a well because one uses a well to bring water, which is life for the body, and religion is life for values.

When we hear the word ‘*urwa* (‘handhold’) in ‘...has indeed grasped the most trustworthy handhold...’ we immediately think of a pail which brings water which is life for the body. So this conveys to us a clear image: ‘...has indeed grasped the most trustworthy handhold....’ As long as it is a ‘most trustworthy handhold’ – which means the religion and faith in God – as long as it is the religion, and the rope of God, this is indeed most trustworthy; and as long as it is ‘most trustworthy,’ this means it will never give way. We should be aware that in Arabic there is the word *infisam*, which means to ‘be broken’, and the word *inqisam*.

Infisam means for something to be disjointed on the inside, like when the bones of an arm break, but it remains attached to the body; and *inqisam* means that one part is separated from the other, so, there is a clean break. The True Lord’s words ‘...that shall not be broken; and God is All-Hearing, All Knowing’ indicate that the actions of the powers of evil will always take the form of whispered insinuations meaning a voice which tempts with enticing words, which is why the term ‘whispers of Satan’ (*waswasat ash-Shaytan*) is taken in Arabic from the word meaning the jingling sound of jewellery and gold, a tempting rustling sound just like the whispers of Satan; and God is All Knowing concerning the matter.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

اللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ ۚ وَالَّذِينَ
 كَفَرُوا أَوْلِيَآءُهُمُ الطَّاغُوتُ يُخْرِجُونَهُم مِّنَ النُّورِ إِلَى الظُّلُمَاتِ ۗ
 أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿٢٥٧﴾

God is the ally of those who believe. He brings them out of the depths of darkness and into the light. As for the disbelievers, their allies are false gods who take them from the light into the depths of darkness, they are the inhabitants of the Fire, and there they will remain [257] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 257)

God *the Most High* is the Protecting Guardian of those who believe as long as they go by the ruling that ‘...whoever disbelieves in *Taghoot* (the force of evil) and believes in God has indeed grasped the most trustworthy handhold....’ It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* is explaining those words with this verse, and as long as the servant is connected with the most trustworthy handhold, and takes hold of it, and it will never give way, his protection by God is assured. The word *waliyy* (rendered here as ‘Protecting guardian’) is derived from the verb *waliya* which means for one thing to follow another successively, without any gap in between them. As long as it follows it without any gap, this means it is the nearest thing to it; and since it is the nearest thing to it, it will be the first one to come to its aid. If someone is walking with me and I lose my footing, I will call upon him because he is the nearest one to me, and he will be the one to help me.

So, there is no gap, and since there is no gap, he will be the first one you call and the first one who will come to your aid even if you do not call him; for you do not need to tell the one who is with you to take your hand; he will take your hand himself automatically. So if you consider the words ‘God is the Protecting Guardian of those who believe...’ you will find that they are also in harmony with ‘...and God is All-Hearing, All Knowing’ (*al-Baqara*: 256); He does not need you to call Him – for there are those who you call upon to save you, but He does not need to be called upon because He is All-Hearing and All-Seeing: ‘God is the Protecting Guardian of those who believe....’

The word *waliyy* is also related to the words *mawla* in *italics* (meaning ‘protecting master’), and *wali* (meaning ‘one who is in charge of certain

affairs’): ‘...the Protecting Guardian of those who believe...’ that is, He will take care of their affairs and concerns; it is like when you say, ‘The governor who takes care of the affairs of the subjects.’ Also, the word *mawla* can sometimes mean a master, and other times mean the master’s servant, which is why a poet said:

O my *mawla*, your *mawla* has a request!

That is: ‘Your slave, o master, has a request.’ So, it is used with meanings which are related; as we said, *waliyy* means ‘near’, and if the slave is in need of something, who is the first person who can help him? His master is. when the master calls, who is the first person to answer him? His servant does. So the word can mean both the master and the slave, and it can also mean the one who takes care of things. ‘God is the Protecting Guardian of those who believe....’ God’s words ‘those who believe’ mean a group of people which includes many individuals, as though He wants those who have faith to make their faith one single thing, not many different things. Or, it may mean that God’s nearness to each individual is as His nearness to all the believers, and as long as they are believers, there is no conflict of allegiances because they are all based in and acting upon a single faith, a single way, a single word, a single deed and a single movement.

How is it that ‘God is the Protecting Guardian of those who believe...’? He is near to them, that is, He is the One who supports them, loves them, answers them and aids them; He is near to them by the signs which lead to faith that He made clear to them; and is there any love greater than this? Did He leave us to search for the signs, or did He show them to us?

This is one aspect of God’s nearness. Before we believed, He made signs for us; and once we believed, He manifested His nearness by aiding us, and if we fight enemies He is with us; and after this, His nearness to us continues until He gives us the ultimate reward in the Hereafter. He is near to us through all the stages: with the signs before faith He is near, and once faith is attained, He accompanies us and is our support against our enemies and His enemies, and in the Hereafter, He is near to us with love and bestowal, and He gives to us without limits; His nearness is infinite.

‘God is the Protecting Guardian of those who believe. He brings them out from the depths of darkness into light....’ He *the Exalted* takes them from the

deep darkness of ignorance into the light of faith because darkness usually conceals all that can be seen; for you cannot see anything unless some light comes to you from the object, i.e. rays of light reflecting from it reach you, and if there is darkness, this means that no rays of light will come from anything so, you will not see them; then, when light emerges, you can see and make things out. This is on the material level, and the same is true on the moral level. '...He brings them out from the depths of darkness into light. And those who disbelieve – their patrons are *Taghoot* (false deities); they bring them out of light into the depths of darkness....'

Had they been in the light in the first place, O Lord? In fact, we can understand this as a reference to the apostates, to whom Satan whispered and so took them into the deep darkness of unbelief after they had been believers. Alternatively, the sentence '...they bring them out of light into the depths of darkness...' may mean that they bar them from the light, preventing them from reaching it i.e preventing them from believing. The Arabic word used here (*akhraja*) means literally to 'bring out,' but it can be understood to mean 'to bar or prevent,' as we find in the following illustration: Someone might say, 'My father has excluded (*akhraja* 'taken out') me from his inheritance?' This does not mean that he was really in the inheritance and was taken out; but rather means that he had the right to inherit, and his father disinherited him; and this applies to those who left faith and preferred darkness.

The Quran elucidates the concept of coming out of darkness into the light and from disbelief to faith in many places, such as the account we have in the story of our master Joseph *peace be upon him* and the two young men who happened to be with him in prison. One of them said that he saw himself in a dream pressing wine. The other said that he saw himself in a dream carrying bread on his head, and birds were eating from it. They asked Joseph to tell them the real interpretation of this, as they saw that he is one of the righteous. Joseph answered them that they would not receive food that is provided to them except that he would inform them of its interpretation before it comes to them; and that is from what his Lord had taught him; indeed, he had left the religion of a people who do not believe in God, and who were also disbelievers in the Hereafter (*Yusuf*: 36-37). The question here is: Was our master Joseph

peace be upon him ever a follower of the ways of the disbelievers, and then left them? No; he never followed the ways of those who disbelieve in God to begin with; these ways were present for him to see, but he rejected them and refused to follow them, and he held fast to the way of Abraham *peace be upon him*; and this expression contains an affirmation of man's free will to choose.

There is also another verse, in which the True Lord *the Most High* addresses all mankind saying that He has created them, and in time will cause them to die; and many a one of them is reduced in old age to a most abject state, ceasing to know anything of what he once knew so well. Indeed, God is all knowing, infinite in His power (*an-Nahl*: 70). The meaning of the verse is that God created us all, and destined a time for all of us to die so that some die young whilst others reach an abject state of old age, becoming once again weak and lacking in energy, not knowing what they used to know. The verse does not mean that a person reaches old age and then becomes a child again.

When the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...And those who disbelieve – their patrons are *Taghoot* (false deities); they bring them out of light into the depths of darkness...', He refers to the powers of evil in the plural when He calls them 'patrons' (*awliya*'), which means literally 'those who are near,' because, as we said, there are many forms of evil powers: Satan is an evil power, swindlers are evil powers, sorcerers are evil powers; and the True Lord *the Most High* uses the singular word *taghoot* in conjunction with the plural word *awliya*', and describes what these powers of evil do to those to whom they are near by saying that they '...bring them out of light into the depths of darkness...', with the verb 'bring out' in the Arabic plural form.

God *the Most High* gives the word *taghoot* ('patrons, false deities') in the Arabic singular form, and then, gives those whom the false deities lead into darkness in the plural form. So why did God not use the Arabic plural *tawaghit* for 'false deities' instead of the singular *taghoot*? The word *taghoot* here is used in the same way in which we can use, in Arabic, a word like '*adl*, 'just/justice', as an adjective to describe both a single man, two men, or a group of men, without changing its form. This is the same way the word *taghoot* is being used here. Satan, the swindler, the priest, the sorcerer, and the ruler who disregards God's commandments, are all false deities and powers of evil, and the verse

uses the singular masculine form of the word. The word *taghoot* can be singular, dual, or plural; that is, those who are taken from the light into the darkness are the near allies of the powers of evil, or those who take the powers of evil as near allies, and they shall abide in hell forever. Both the powers of evil and their followers will enter hell, as the True Lord *the Most High* says in His Book that on the Day of Judgement, the worshippers of false deities will be told that they and all that they worshipped instead of God are but the fuel of hell: that is what they are destined for (*al-Anbiya*': 98).

The followers of the false deities, and the forces of evil themselves, are destined for the fire of hell- may God *the Most High* save us, and you, from its torment. The True Lord *the Most High* wants to give us a real-life image of His words 'God is the Protecting Guardian of those who believe...'; for He is the Protector, and He is the Helper. He *the Exalted* therefore says:

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِي حَاجَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ فِي رَبِّهِ أَنْ آتَاهُ اللَّهُ الْمُلْكَ إِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّي
الَّذِي يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ قَالَ أَنَا أُحْيِي وَأُمِيتُ ۖ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْتِي بِالشَّمْسِ مِنَ
الْمَشْرِقِ فَأْتِ بِهَا مِنَ الْمَغْرِبِ فَبُهِتَ الَّذِي كَفَرَ ۗ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٢٥٨﴾

[Prophet], have you not thought about the man who disputed with Abraham about his Lord, because God had given him power to rule? When Abraham said, 'It is my Lord who gives life and death,' he said, 'I too give life and death.' So Abraham said, 'God brings the sun from the east; so bring it from the west.' The disbeliever was dumbfounded: God does not guide those who do evil [258] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 258)

When you hear the words 'Did you not see' you know that it is composed of the words 'Did', and the negative particle 'not' and the verb which it negates, namely 'see.' The use of the Arabic particle (*hamza*), which is used to indicate the interrogative, and is rendered here as 'Did', here implies denial, and denial means to negate in order to reproach; but it does not refer to a verb in the affirmative so that it could be said to have denied the verb which comes after it, as is the case when you say to your son, 'Would you hit your father?' The 'would' here, which is expressed in Arabic by the particle (*hamza*), is not meant

to be a question, but is rather meant to repudiate this kind of action because the verb which comes after it is in the affirmative, namely ‘hit’, and the word ‘would’ comes before it. In Arabic this is called the (*hamza*) of reproachful denial, and is used for reproof. So denial means to negate something by way of reproof when it is used with a verb which is also negated.

As long as denial is a negation, and the verb which comes after it is also negated, it is as though you have negated a negative, which means you have affirmed something. It is as though when the True Lord *the Most High* says to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, ‘Did you not see,’ it really means ‘You did see.’ So, why did He not say to him, ‘Did you see?’ It came in this negative form so that it would be even more affirmed. It is possible to make the affirmation come from the responsible party: if a friend says to you, ‘You have not asked about me, and you have been neglecting me,’ you might reply reminding him by saying, ‘Did I not help you when you were weak? Did I not take your hand when you were sick?’

You have already done these favours for your friend, but you want to deny the negation which he is saying; and in this way we know that two negatives make an affirmative, which is why we can consider God’s words ‘Did you not see’ as meaning, ‘You did see.’ Seeing is done with the eye; and did the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* – and he is the principal one who is addressed by the Noble Quran from his Lord – did the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* see this incident from the days of Abraham *peace be upon him*? Of course not, so it is as though ‘Did you not see’ here means ‘Do you not know.’

And why did He say ‘Did you not see’ here? He said it so that we would know that when God *the Most High* says ‘Do you not know,’ it is as though you can see the thing which He tells you about, and you must consider it to be as true as if you saw it with your own eyes. The eye is one of your senses, and senses might deceive you, but your Lord does not deceive. So, ‘Did you not see’ means ‘Do you not know with complete certainty,’ as though you indeed saw the event that God *the Most High* is telling you about. This is why He put the question to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* whether he did not see how his Lord dealt with the Army of the Elephant (*al-Fil*: 1). The

Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was born in the Year of the Elephant, so, he did not see this incident; and it is as though God *the Most High* is telling him of it, and saying to him: 'Do you not know', as though He is saying to him: 'Know it with certainty as if you can see it, because your Lord is more trustworthy than your own eyes.' When it is said, 'Did you not see', it is usually followed directly by the doer of the action referred to, so, you say, 'Did you not see such-and-such?' Yet when the True Lord *the Most High* says 'Did you not see the one who argued with Abraham about his Lord...', He used the particle *ila*, which means 'to', after the verb 'see'; and the use of the particle *ila* here indicates that a wondrous thing took place; sometimes in Arabic we speak in this way, saying literally, 'Did you not see 'to' (*ila*) Zaid and what he was doing?'

This means that what Zaid was doing was something amazing. Herein, it is as though God *the Most High* is alluding to the final end of the matter since the word 'to' implies the idea of arriving to a goal; it is as though it was something which reached the utmost end of wonder – so, do not only take it as though you saw it, but look at the final outcome of what had taken place.

The True Lord *the Most High* here says, 'Did you not see the one who argued with Abraham about his Lord....' The use of the particle *ila* here in Arabic indicates that it was a matter which reached the utmost limit of wonder. The True Lord *the Most High* did not tell us who this person was who argued with Abraham *peace be upon him* about his Lord because his identity does not concern us, whether it was Nimrud or someone else.

If some exegetes stated that it was a king named Nimrud, we say to them: Thank you for your effort, but had God *the Most High* wanted the man's name to be specified He would have specified it for us. What matters to us is that someone went to God's Messenger Abraham *peace be upon him* and argued with him on this subject, and his identity is not significant. When the True Lord *the Most High* wants to make an event applicable and relevant to all times and places, He does not specify names. Any person, in any place, might argue with any believer, but this is not the case when a person is named and identified.

Another instance of this is about those people who seek to know more about the story of the People of the Cave, wondering where, and when, and how many of them there were, and who they were. We say: If any one of these

things were discovered, the story would be ruined because if we specified its time, someone would come and say, ‘At the time when the story took place, such a thing was possible;’ and if we specified the place, someone else would say, ‘The place allowed the event to occur;’ and if we specified the identities of the people and their names, a third person would say, ‘It is possible that these personalities could have acted in this way, but how could we have the strength of faith that they had?’

The True Lord *the Most High* did not specify the place, time, or personalities, leaving them ambiguous to show us that any group of youths, in any time and in any place could have said what they said; and had He specified any of these things, the lesson to be derived from as an example, would have been spoiled. Let us consider the precision of the True Lord *the Most High* when he gives an example to the disbelievers of the wife of Noah *peace be upon him* and the wife of Lot *peace be upon him*, when He *the Exalted* puts forth for those who disbelieve the example of Noah’s wife and Lot’s wife: they were wedded to two of God’s righteous servants, and each one betrayed her husband; and neither of the two husbands will be of any avail to these two women before God when they are told on Judgment Day to enter the Fire with all those who are doomed to enter it (*at-Tahrim*: 10).

He did not specify for us the names of these two women, but rather mentioned only the important thing which is that each of them was the wife of a noble messenger, yet, both of them insisted on disbelief and so entered hell. But when He *the Exalted* wanted to make the story specific to one particular person and to a specific event, that would not be repeated in any time or place, He *the Exalted* said that He puts forth as another example for those who believe: Mary Daughter of ‘Imran *peace be upon her* who guarded her chastity, and God breathed of His Spirit into her, and she accepted the truth of her Lord’s words and of His Books, and was one of the truly devout (*at-Tahrim*: 12).

What was the reason for the True Lord’s specification of Mary *peace be upon her* in this the event? It was because the event would not be repeated for any other woman. Specification here is necessary because a virgin birth would be granted to no other woman. If the event can be repeated in any time or place, He *the Exalted* describes it in general terms; and an example of this is the words of the

True Lord *the Most High*: 'Did you not see the one who argued with Abraham about his Lord....' He did not tell us who this man was. The Arabic verb for 'argued' (*hajja*) has originally the form of *hajaja*, in the same morphological form as the verbs *qatala* and *sharaka*, for example; however, when the final two letters are the same, we join them together to make it easier in pronunciation, so, it becomes *hajja*; and this verbal form follows the morphological pattern of *fa'ala*, which indicates mutual interaction; and in order to understand what is meant by this, consider the following example:

We may say, 'Zaid fought 'Amr,' or say, 'Amr fought Zaid,' and this means that each of them fought the other, and each of them was both subject (active, doer of the action) and object (passive, receiver of the action) at the same time, but in one sentence we consider one of them to have been more active and in the other to have been more passive, although both of them were active and passive.

Another example: If you say that Zaid shared something with 'Amr, and 'Amr shared something with Zaid, this means that cooperation came from both of them, and both are active and passive at the same time, but we usually attribute the more active role to the one who began, and the more passive role to the second, even though the second one is also active. This is why when the poet wanted to describe the state of a person who walks in a place where there are lots of snakes, and is wary that a snake may bite him, he said:

The snakes and his foot made peace with each other,

The serpent and the strong thick adder.

The poet here describes for us a person who walks in a place full of snakes, and a person usually fears that a snake will bite him; but we find that the snakes were at peace with this man's foot, i.e. they did not bite him because he did not attack them, and snakes usually do not bite unless they are first attacked. We find here that the snakes were active here because they left his foot alone; and we could also say that it was his foot that made peace with the snakes.

We have all studied, in the past, the Arabic linguistic phenomenon known as 'substitution' (*badal*), and a substituted word is subject to the same grammatical rules as the word for which it is a substitute: if the substituted word is in the nominative case, the substitute word will also be in the nominative

case, and if the substituted word is in the accusative case, the substitute word will also be in the accusative case, and if the substituted word is in the genitive case, the substitute word will also be in the genitive case. In this verse of poetry, the word ‘snakes’ is in the nominative case, yet the word ‘serpents’ is in the accusative case even though it is a substitute for a nominative word, namely ‘snakes’; this is because the poet wanted to show that the noun is also a receiver of action, so, he gave it in the accusative case. Likewise, we can also read the first part of the verse as ‘his foot made peace with the snakes’ because they are both active and passive in a certain way.

Likewise, when we read the words of the True Lord *the Most High* ‘Did you not see the one who argued with Abraham about his Lord...’, we notice that the word ‘Abraham’ in the noble verse is marked by the Arabic accusative case marker, which implies that it is largely passive. So who was it that argued with Abraham *peace be upon him*? It was a certain person, and he was the active one because he started the argument, and this is what the noble verse indicates to us. The verse describes the man by saying that ‘...God had given him kingship...’, that is, God *the Most High* had granted this man kingship, and then this man argued with Abraham *peace be upon him* about his Lord, as though it was this man who began the argument by saying to Abraham *peace be upon him*, ‘Who is your Lord?’

So Abraham *peace be upon him* said, ‘...“My Lord is the one who gives life and causes death”’ This is one of the distinctions of the Quran; in that it leaves certain things out, trusting that the listener will put everything in its proper place. God’s words ‘...Abraham said, “My Lord is the one who gives life and causes death,”’ indicate that the one who argued with Abraham *peace be upon him* said, ‘Who is your Lord,’ and Abraham *peace be upon him* said in reply, ‘...My Lord is the one who gives life and causes death.’

We can notice that this verse came after God’s words in the previous verse: ‘God is the Protecting Guardian of those who believe....’ Protecting guardianship means support, love and aid, so, He *the Exalted* wanted to show us how God *the Most High* aided Abraham *peace be upon him* against the one who argued with him.

Yet, the one who argued with Abraham *peace be upon him* began to use deceptive sophistic argumentation after he heard Abraham *peace be upon him* say '...My Lord is the one who gives life and causes death....' And the True Lord *the Most High* said 'gives life and causes death' because this is something which no one has claimed they do, and no one has claimed to be a part of doing; even if you ask the disbelievers, 'Who created?', they will say, 'God.' 'So, this is something certain, except that the contender who argued with Abraham *peace be upon him* wanted to turn the argument into sophistry, and as we know this means speech which lengthens an argument so it never ends.

The man who was arguing with Abraham *peace be upon him* said, 'If your Lord grants life and causes death, then I also can grant life and deal death.' Abraham *peace be upon him* asked him, 'How do you grant life and deal death?' The man said, 'I could kill the prisoners I have, or not kill them; for the ones I do not kill, it is as though I have given them life, and for the ones I kill, I have dealt death.' Abraham *peace be upon him* did not say: Let us agree first: What is life? And what is death? This is because Abraham, the Friend of the Most Merciful *the Exalted*, did not want to lengthen this debate, so, he came up with something to silence the man completely and end the debate. He said to him, '..."Indeed, God brings up the sun from the east, so, bring it up from the west." The disbeliever was confounded....' In this way, our master Abraham *peace be upon him* ended this debate. It was possible for our master Abraham *peace be upon him* to have entered into further debate, saying: 'What is life?'

We know that life means giving an inanimate thing something which makes it move, feel, will and choose. As for death, it is removing the spirit from the body; what causes a man to die is for his spirit to leave his body. Killing is different from dying because death is for the spirit to leave the body without any wound, and without the body being destroyed, or by any action the person does to his own body, like suicide.

A person might be sitting in his place when suddenly his life term ends and he dies; and no one could have said to him before this, 'Die' so that he died. This is death; but to force the spirit out by a bodily wound or destroying the body is killing, not death. This is why God *the Most High* contrasted death with killing when He addressed the believers during the Messenger's life

saying that Muhammad is only a messenger; all the other messengers have passed away before him: if, then, he dies or is killed, will they turn about on their heels? But he that turns about on his heels can in no way harm God; and God will reward all who are grateful to Him. And no human being can die except by God's leave, at a term pre-ordained. And if one desires the rewards of this world, God will grant him from it; and if one desires the rewards of the life to come, God will grant him from it; and He will reward those who are grateful to Him (*Al-Imran*: 144-145).

God *the Most High* clarified for us the difference between dying and being killed, and placed each of them in contrast to the other; when news went around that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had been killed, some of the Muslims considered returning to disbelief, and God rebuked them by saying: Muhammad is a messenger sent from God, and other messengers have died before him; and if he dies or is killed, will you leave faith for disbelief? And whoever does this is only harming himself, and reward from God is for those who adhere firmly to God's Way and are grateful for His blessings. The True Lord *the Most High* clarified for us here that death can come to no one save by God's leave, and God has destined all deaths in a pre-ordained decree.

God *the Most High* wants to alert us and draw our attention to an important fact, which is that when the messengers argued with their people or those who conversed with them, the goal of this was not for the prophet to win a victory, but rather, the goal of the prophet or messenger was to reach the truth. This is why Abraham *peace be upon him* did not proceed with the man who argued with him about God, on the point of giving life and dealing death since he saw that the man's words were a kind of sophistry.

We must ponder upon the verses of the Quran according to the reflection of faith in order to understand the difference between causing death and killing. It is true that causing death and killing are alike in one thing, which is that the spirit comes out of the body; however, causing death is different from killing in that no one can do it except the Giver of life, who placed certain constituents in the human body so that the spirit could live within it, and He Alone is able to remove the spirit from it in an intangible way.

As for killing, it is for you to injure a person so he dies, or to destroy his body, for example by smashing his head. As for 'causing death' it is for you to take his life by merely commanding it, without coming near him: can any human being do this? No. So the one who argued with Abraham *peace be upon him* did not really give life to the one whom he left without punishing him; he did not kill him, but rather merely left the life which was already in him. We need to heed this if we want to get into a debate on this matter.

God *the Most High* contrasted killing with death; it is true that they both end with the absence of the spirit, but there is a difference between a spirit being taken without any of these means, and the spirit leaving the body because it has been destroyed. Beware of thinking that the spirit does not obey certain laws; the spirit can only reside in a particular substance, and if the special constituents of this substance cease to exist, the spirit cannot reside in it. Do not say that when he struck him on the head, he dealt death to him! No, he did not make the spirit come out, because simply by the body being destroyed, the spirit is concealed.

An example to clarify this: Suppose that there is a light in front of us: if you break the bulb, the light goes. But is the bulb the light itself? No, it is not, but the electricity can only become plain by means of this bulb. In the same way, the spirit can only exist in a body which has specific constituents. So the killer does not take the spirit out, he only destroys the body in a tangible way; for the unseen matter, namely the spirit, cannot dwell in a body which has been destroyed.

'Did you not see the one who argued with Abraham about his Lord [simply] because God had given him kingship?...'. Look at the arrogance: Is being granted kingship, which is a blessing, a means for rebelling against the One Who blessed you? Do you show gratitude for the blessing by disobeying the One Who gave it? Who was it that made him so vain? Did he become so vain because God gave him kingship? How could God help someone who does not believe in Him? Sovereignty (*mulk*), meaning the right to command and prohibit, is only for those who are sent by God; as for the other sovereignty of kingship (*mulk*) which gives one man authority over a group, it is possible that this could be given to a believer, and it is possible that it could be given to a disbeliever.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...because God had given him kingship? When Abraham said, “My Lord is the one who gives life and causes death...”’ This was the reply to the one who said, ‘Who is your Lord?’ to which Abraham’s reply was, ‘...“My Lord is the one who gives life and causes death”. He said, “I give life and cause death.”...’ We saw that this is mere sophistry; and Abraham *peace be upon him* did not reply to him, ‘Do you really give life and cause death?’, but rather, he moved on to something else, as though he were saying to him: ‘Forget about the unseen matter of the spirit, and consider instead what can be plainly seen’: ‘...Abraham said, “Indeed, God brings up the sun from the east, so bring it up from the west.” The disbeliever was confounded....’

Because God *the Most High* is the Protecting Guardian of those who believe, He *the Exalted* did not inspire the arguer with any way to respond; he could have said, ‘Make the One Who brings it from the east bring it from the west,’ but he did not say this, which shows that he was a fool. Or, alternatively, he might have been clever, and said to himself, ‘Perhaps the Lord who is with him in this way might actually do it!’, and so he was afraid to say it. So ‘God is the Protecting guardian of those who believe...’ is the truth; and He *the Exalted* ‘...brings them out from the depths of darkness into light...’ (*al-Baqara*: 257).

What does it mean to be ‘confounded’? To be confounded takes three forms: The first form is astonishment; he took him from something which he could speak about petulantly to something which he could not speak about, even petulantly and argumentatively. He wanted to find some way of responding, as he did when he said, ‘...“I give life and cause death...”’ but he could not. He was astonished, and the first thing to take him off guard was this astonishment, after which came confusion: he wanted to find any way out of this trap, but he could not; so, he was defeated, and this is the final stage of being confounded. So ‘...was confounded...’ means that firstly, he was astonished, and secondly he was confused and unable to respond, and thirdly the result of this was that he was defeated. This is not something surprising because as long as he was a disbeliever, he had no one near to him to help him since those who were near to him were incapable: ‘...And those who disbelieve – their patrons are *Taghoot* (false deities)...’ As for Abraham *peace be upon him*, the Friend of the Most Merciful *the Exalted*, God was near to him.

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by saying, ‘...and God does not guide the wrongdoing people.’ He does not guide them to a proof, or an argument, or evidence since their patron is Satan, ‘...and God does not guide the wrongdoing people.’

The verse which comes after this deals all with life and death. And it is important that the verse deals with life and death so that we do not understand that Abraham *peace be upon him* left the argument with the one who argued with him about life and death, as a way of evading speaking about it; for this reason, God *the Most High* wants to conclusively deal with this matter by means of several stories, and the True Lord *the Most High* now expounds on the issue which Abraham *peace be upon him* avoided, namely death and life, saying:

أَوْ كَالَّذِي مَرَّ عَلَى قَرْيَةٍ وَهِيَ خَاوِيَةٌ عَلَى عُرُوشِهَا قَالَ أَنَّى يُحْيِي هَذِهِ اللَّهُ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا
فَأَمَاتَهُ اللَّهُ مِائَةَ عَامٍ ثُمَّ بَعَثَهُ قَالَ كَمْ لَبِثْتَ قَالَ لَبِثْتُ يَوْمًا أَوْ بَعْضَ يَوْمٍ قَالَ بَلْ
لَبِثْتَ مِائَةَ عَامٍ فَانْظُرْ إِلَى طَعَامِكَ وَشَرَابِكَ لَمْ يَتَسَنَّهْ وَانْظُرْ إِلَى حِمَارِكَ
وَلِنَجْعَلَكَ آيَةً لِلنَّاسِ وَانْظُرْ إِلَى الْعِظَامِ كَيْفَ نُنْشِزُهَا ثُمَّ
نَكْسُوهَا لَحْمًا فَلَمَّا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُ قَالَ أَعْلَمُ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٥٩﴾

Or take the one who passed by a ruined town. He said, ‘How will God give this life when it has died?’ So God made him die for a hundred years, and then raised him up, saying, ‘How long did you stay like that?’ He answered, ‘A day, or part of a day.’ God said, ‘No, you stayed like that for a hundred years. Look at your food and drink: they have not gone bad. Look at your donkey – We will make you a sign for the people – look at the bones: see how We bring them together and clothe them with flesh.’ When all became clear to him, he said, ‘Now I know that God has power over everything’ [259] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 259)

When we consider the beginning of this verse, we find that it begins with ‘Or’, and whatever comes after the word ‘or’ is connected to what came before it; so, it is as though the True Lord *the Most High* wants to say to us: Or ‘Did you not see’ the like of ‘the one who passed by a village...’?

When you hear the word ‘village’, it indicates a group of people gathered together to live in a specific place; and we understand that the one who passed by this village was not one of its inhabitants, but rather that, he passed by it while on a journey or a voyage. We also notice that the True Lord *the Most High* did not want to give us the name of the village or the name of the one who passed by it.

Some people say that the man was Ermiya (Jeremiah) ibn Halqiya’, or that it was Al-Khidr, or ‘Uzair (Ezra); and we said before that if the True Lord *the Most High* left this ambiguous, this means that we should not try to specify it because such a thing could happen to anyone.

‘Or [consider such an example] as the one who passed by a village...’, and they said that the town was Jerusalem, ‘...which was deserted and had fallen into utter ruin....’ To understand how it could have been deserted (*khawiya*) and in utter ruin, we should know that in Arabic when one says, ‘I am famished (*khooyan*)’, what he is saying is that his stomach is empty (*khawia*), and that he is hungry. So the word *khawiya* here means that the town was empty of inhabitants; its structures might have still been standing, but it contained no inhabitants. The True Lord *the Most High* says of this town that it was ‘...deserted and had fallen into utter ruin...’, and the word ‘*arsh*’ means a tent and also a ceiling; so, when He says ‘...deserted and had fallen into utter ruin...’ (literally ‘empty on top of its roofs’), this means that first the roofs caved in, and then the walls fell on top of them; it is like what we say in our dialect: ‘He brought the top of it down on the bottom.’

When one passes by a village like this one, the sight of it will certainly be something which draws his attention. He said, ‘...“How will God bring this to life after its death?”’ It is as though he was asking about the village, and about causing the people who lived in it to die and then raising them to life. When the True Lord *the Most High* mentions a village in the Noble Quran, He is sometimes referring to its inhabitants, such as is the case when He tells about Joseph’s brothers protesting their truthfulness to their father telling him to ask the (people in the) village in which they were staying and the people of the caravan with whom they travelled, and that they were indeed telling the truth (*Yusuf*: 82).

When the sons of Jacob *peace be upon him* came back from Egypt and left their youngest brother with Joseph *peace be upon him*, they said to their father, 'Send someone to bring a testimony from the people of Egypt, and ask those who were with us in the caravan for yourself, and they will tell you that we left our brother in Egypt.' But the question of the one who passed by the town which was deserted and in utter ruin was about the town's inhabitants: '...“How (Arabic *Anna*) will God bring this to life after its death?”....’ The Arabic word *anna* is sometimes used to mean ‘how’ and sometimes ‘whence’; and here the appropriate interpretation of the question is: ‘...How will God bring all this to life after its death?....’ The fact that he said this indicates that he was a believer, and he did not doubt that life is given by God, but he wanted to know how this could be. It is as though he believed that God gives life and causes death; and we shall see this later in the story of our master Abraham *peace be upon him* when he asked his Lord to show him how He brings the dead back to life (*al-Baqara*: 260).

He did not doubt that God *the Most High* gives life to the dead, but he wanted to see how this is done; for the one who wants to see how something is done must be amazed by the existence of this thing, so, he wonders how this thing could have been executed. For example, we see the pyramids, and we do not doubt that the pyramids are built in this form, but we merely wonder how they built them, and how they transported those huge stones to the top without any scaffolding or mechanical cranes. So we are merely amazed, and amazement is part of belief in the event.

Asking about how something was done means that one is absolutely convinced that it was indeed done, so, the traveller's question reported in the Quran using *anna* should be understood to mean: How will God bring this town back to life after its death? It is as though the one who said this, did not doubt that God gives life, but he wanted to know how. Knowing how is not essential for faith, but God has not forbidden us from trying to know how things come to be; for He knows that we believe that He is able to bring this event into existence.

I will give an example for this – and God *the Most High* is beyond compare: when a designer of clothes makes a delicate and beautiful item of clothing,

you see it and you are certain that he is the one who made it, but you are simply amazed by the delicacy of the product, so, you say to him, ‘By God, how did you do that?’ It is as though you have fallen in love with his product, and you long to know how it was made; so, what about the products of the True Lord *the Most High*? You are astounded and amazed to live in the shadow of the secret which runs from the Creator to the created, and you want to share these blessings.

Another example – and God *the Most High* is beyond compare before and after: You see a painting done by an artist, and you say to him, ‘By God, how did you mix these colours?’ You do not doubt that he mixed the colours, but you want to please yourself by knowing how he painted them. So the man’s question, and the request of Abraham *peace be upon him* about giving life and causing death -which are yet to be mentioned- do not mean that he was not a believer, but rather that, he longed and yearned to know how this takes place, in order that he could live in the light of the beautiful and magnificent production of the One who made this thing.

We know that to bring the people back to life, would mean that the town would be brought to life, for people send out the motion which fills existence with life, and people have life and they have death; and a town, with its rubble, walls and roofs also has life and death. When the man asked this question, God *the Most High* wanted the answer to be in the form of an experience that the questioner would live through, which is why the Noble Quran then says, ‘...So God caused him to die for a hundred years....’

The one who asked the question wanted to know how, and his request was for faith based on evidence so that from thenceforth, his faith would be based on something he had witnessed. ‘...So God caused him to die for a hundred years....’ God *the Most High* made the question and the experience apply to the questioner himself; and this is how God *the Most High* gives information. He caused him to die for a hundred years; and the word for ‘year’ used here is ‘*am*’, which means a full year; and they called it ‘*am*’ because the sun ‘swims’ (*ta’oom*) through its entire celestial circuit in this time, and the verb ‘*ama*’ means ‘to swim’ or ‘float’, as the True Lord *the Most High* says that all of the celestial bodies float through space (*Ya Sin*: 40). This is why we call a year ‘*am*’.

‘...So God caused him to die for a hundred years; then He brought him back to life. He said, “How long have you remained?” The man said, “I have remained a day or part of a day.”...’ It is possible that God *the Most High* spoke directly to him as He spoke to Moses *peace be upon him*, or he might have heard a voice, or an angel, or it might be that someone present saw what happened to him and asked him; what is important is that there was a question and an answer, and the True Lord *the Most High* informs us of a dialogue which took place about this matter; the question was ‘How long have you remained?’ and the man answered, ‘I have remained a day or part of a day.’

The man’s answer shows that he had some doubt: he might have found that the day was close to ending or had ended and so answered in this way; or, it might have been that when he saw the sun still shining he gave this answer: ‘I have remained a day or part of a day;’ or he might have said this because he was unable to judge how much time had passed. Was he being honest in his words, or was he lying? He was being honest because he did not see anything that had changed so that he could have judged according to how it changed. Had he shaved his beard, for example, and then found after this that it had grown long, or had his hair had changed from black to grey as he slept, or had any other such changes occurred, he would have noticed them; but he did not find any change.

So, what was the answer of the True Lord *the Most High*? He said, ‘...Rather, you have remained one hundred years....’ We are presented here with two sides, and the question is close to being a puzzle: On one side, we have the man saying, ‘I have remained a day or part of a day,’ and on the other side, the Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...Rather, you have remained one hundred years....’ We wish to solve this puzzle: The statement of True Lord *the Most High* is beyond any doubt truthful and free of any error, whilst the believing servant is also speaking truthfully as best as he can based on what he sees his situation to be.

We need an evidence for this, and an evidence for that. We need an evidence that the servant is truthful in saying ‘I have remained a day or part of a day’ and we need from the True Lord *the Most High* an evidence to reassure us – not as a proof – that the man really died for one hundred years and then came back to life.

We say that in the story there is something to support the statement ‘I have remained a day or part of a day’ and also something which supports the statement ‘...Rather, you have remained one hundred years...’ for the man had with him his ass, and also his food and drink, of juice, grapes, and figs. The True Lord *the Most High* said, ‘...you have remained one hundred years...’ and He wanted to prove the truth of both matters together, so He said, ‘...Look at your food and your drink; it has not changed with time...’ The man looked at his food and drink and found that they had not changed, which is evidence that he had remained only a day or part of a day; this shows the truthfulness of the man, and there still remains the question of ‘...one hundred years...’

The True Lord *the Most High* then said, ‘...And look at your donkey; and We will make you a sign for the people....’ This shows that something amazing had occurred, and God wanted to show him this by having him look at the donkey to show that a hundred years truly had passed. So the man found that his donkey had become scattered bones, and this could not have happened in a short period of time; the donkey might have died in one day, but for its body to rot, and then its flesh to turn into dust so that only scattered bones remained required a long period of time not less than a hundred years. So it is as though, looking upon the donkey was evidence that a hundred years truly had passed, and looking upon the food was evidence of the truthfulness of ‘a day or part of a day.’

So, it was an amazing matter, how time was held back in the case of the food, and how time was let forth in the case of the donkey. He *the Exalted* shows us that He is the One Who holds back, and the One Who sends forth; He can hold back time for one thing and He can send forth time for another even if the two things are contemporaneous. Such an action could only be performed by an Omnipotent Power which is not subject to the natural laws of the universe, but which rather has dominion over these laws.

The True Lord *the Most High* said, ‘...and We will make you a sign for the people....’ Which men are they for whom God would make him a sign? There must have been other people in this story, but the town was deserted and in utter ruin, and there were neither people nor buildings in it; so, were they the people who had been in the town, or were they other people? Some exegetes say this, and others say that.

The thing which most applies to God's statement '...and We will make you a sign for the people....' is how He held back time for one thing and sent it forth for another. Most of the scholars affirm that it was Ezra who passed by the town; and Ezra was one of the four men who memorised the Torah, for no one memorised the Torah but four people: Moses, Jesus, Ezra, and Joshua *peace be upon them*, and God showed him how He puts bones together and then raises them so they come together, and then clothes them with flesh; that is, He showed him a direct vision of the act of raising the dead to life, and this was an answer to: '...How will God bring this to life after its death?....'

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...And look at the bones [of this donkey] – how We raise them....' Ezra saw all the bones of his donkey rising from the ground, and witnessed each bone being put in its place, and once the skeletal structure of the donkey had been restored the bones began to be clothed in flesh, and then life came.

Ezra found an answer in his own self, and found an answer in the donkey, and after this he remembered his town from which he had come, and he wanted to return to it. When he returned, he found that it has changed as it would be expected to change over a hundred years. There was a slave-woman who lived in his family in the town, and she had gone blind and become infirm, and when he entered and said, 'I am Ezra', the slave-woman said, 'Ezra left a hundred years ago, and we know not where he went; nor did he ever return.' He said, 'I am Ezra,' so, she replied, 'Ezra has a sign, which is that his supplications are always answered;' and she did not forget herself, saying, 'If you are truly Ezra, then ask God to return my eyesight to me and to relieve me of my infirmity.' So, Ezra prayed to God and she was cured. When she was cured, she looked at him and saw that he truly was Ezra, so, she went to her people and announced that Ezra had returned. After this, Ezra went to his son and found that he was a man of over one hundred years of age, and Ezra was still young, at only fifty years of age.

A poet put it cryptically: 'Who was the son who saw his father when he was double his father's age?' The answer to this puzzle is Ezra whom God caused to die when he was fifty years of age, and then brought him back to life after one hundred years, upon which Ezra met his son, and the son said, 'I

used to hear that my father had a mark between his shoulders, a birthmark', and when Ezra showed his shoulder to his son, he saw the birthmark there.

The people of the town confirmed the veracity of Ezra in still another way. When Nebuchadnezzar (Bakhtansar) came to Jerusalem and destroyed it, he burned the Torah; however, a man said that his father had buried a copy of the Torah somewhere; so, they brought forth the copy, and Ezra said, 'I have memorised it', so, Ezra recited the Torah just as it was in the copy, so, they believed that he truly was Ezra. The people were amazed to see a son who was over one hundred years old, whilst his father was only fifty, which is why the True Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by saying, '...he said, 'I know that God has power over all things.' Had he not known before this that God has power over all things? Indeed he had known this by means of reasoning based on evidence, but now he knew it based on actual witnessing, and he had absolute knowledge since there is no doubt once you have seen with your own eyes.

So '...I know that God has power over all things' is an emphasis and an acknowledgement of God's power to set forth time and hold it back, and God's power to give life and cause death; he came to know with absolute certainty after having known before with sure certainty.

This matter explains what modern science now says about 'suspended animation', and the meaning of suspended animation is the thing which certain snakes do when they undergo winter hibernation, that is, during winter they curl up into themselves and show no movement, and they remain in this state until winter ends; and the time spent in winter hibernation is not counted as part of the snake's age, which is why it is said that this is a process of 'suspended animation.' This process might also explain what happened to the People of the Cave; for the People of the Cave also underwent the same process. God tells that He awakened them; and they began to ask one another as to what had happened to them. One of them asked how long they have remained and the others answered that they have remained a day or part of a day (*Yusuf*: 19) They did not see that they had changed in any way, yet, after this the True Lord *the Most High* says that they remained in their cave three hundred years and nine more years (*Yusuf*: 25).

God *the Most High* specified the length of time which they remained, whilst they themselves said that it had been a day or part of a day. The meaning of this is that when they slept this kind of sleep and then woke up, they found themselves in the very same state as they had been before they slept; so, God suspended their lives. We can observe that all of this process came here in the story of Ezra after *Ayat Al-Kursi* the (Verse of the Seat), in which the doctrine of faith is depicted: God – there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of [all] existence. Neither drowsiness overtakes Him, nor does sleep. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. Who is it that can intercede with Him except by His permission? He knows what is [presently] before them and what will be after them, and they encompass not a thing of His knowledge except for what He wills. His *Kursi* (Seat) extends over the heavens and the earth, and their preservation tires Him not. And He is *the Most High*, the Most Great (*al-Baqara*: 255).

And it depicts the matter of life and the matter of death; and we know that when the man argued with Abraham *peace be upon him* and said, ‘...I give life and cause death’ (*al-Baqara*: 258), Abraham moved the debate onto the matter of night and day, and asked the man to reverse the sign of night and day, saying to him, ‘...“Indeed, God brings up the sun from the east, so bring it up from the west.” So, the disbeliever was confounded, and God does not guide the wrongdoing people’ (*al-Baqara*: 258).

In order that no one might think that Abraham *peace be upon him* left the matter of life and death because he wanted to escape having to debate it and so changed the subject to that of the sun, God wanted to bring the story of this man who passed by the deserted town whereupon there happened to him all that we have seen in order for the True Lord *the Most High* to affirm for us that the matters of life and death are in His Hand alone, and in order for the True Lord *the Most High* to take the matter of life and death away from the realm of debate based on sophistry; and we know the meaning of ‘sophistry’ from before when we discussed the statement of the one who argued with Abraham about his Lord when he said about two of his prisoners, that he could kill one of them and let the other live.

This is sophistry, for he did not give life but rather let life continue; and we know that giving life is the opposite of causing death because to cause death means to take the spirit out of the body without causing any injury or destroying the body, or doing anything else to the body. But if one does any of these things to another person, it is not said that he dealt them death, but rather that, he killed them; and as we know, being killed is not the same as dying.

After this, comes another story of Abraham after the incident when he changed the subject of the debate with the man to the sun so that the one who disbelieved was dumbfounded. Abraham *peace be upon him* was a believer in God's Power, but he wanted to know how it happened. Abraham *peace be upon him* did not have any doubt as the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'We have more right to doubt than Abraham did when he said, 'My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead.' [God] said, 'Have you not believed?' He said, 'Yes, but [I ask] only that my heart may be fully at ease.'⁽¹⁾

And we Muslims do not doubt this matter, so, Abraham *peace be upon him* certainly did not doubt it, as is attested to by the words of the verse in which God *the Most High* said:

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ أَرِنِي كَيْفَ تُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ قَالَ أُولِمُ تُوْمِنُ قَالَ بَلَىٰ وَلَٰكِن لِّيَطْمَئِنَّ قَلْبِي قَالَ فَخُذْ أَرْبَعَةً مِّنَ الطَّيْرِ فَصُرْهُنَّ إِلَيْكَ ثُمَّ أَجْعَلْ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ جَبَلٍ مِّنْهُنَّ جُزْءًا ثُمَّ ادْعُهُنَّ يَأْتِينَكَ سَعْيًا وَاعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٢٦٠﴾

And when Abraham said, 'My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead,' He said, 'Do you not believe, then?' 'Yes,' said Abraham, 'but just to put my heart at rest.' So God said, 'Take four birds and train them to come back to you. Then place them on separate hill- tops, call them back, and they will come flying to you: know that God is all powerful and wise' [260] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 260)

Abraham *peace be upon him* asked, 'Show me how You give life to the dead.' That is, he asked to know what the state of the action of raising to life

(1) Narrated by *Al-Bukhari in Kitab Al-Anbiya'*

is. Abraham *peace be upon him* is not speaking about raising to life, and his doubt was only regarding as to whether God *the Most High* would answer his request by showing him and letting him see how He gives life to the dead. Let us give an example to illustrate this – and God is beyond compare before and after, and the example is only meant to make the matter easier for minds to understand since God is far exalted above any comparison:

One of us might say to an architectural engineer, ‘How did you build that house?’ The one who asks this question is referring to an action, and to a product, namely the house which was built. Does knowing how have anything to do with doctrine? No.

We must understand first what ‘doctrine’ (*‘aqida*) means. A doctrine means something tied fast (*ma‘qud*); and if this is the case, then how could he have said, ‘...only that my heart may be fully at ease....’ Does this indicate that before asking the question, and before it was asked, Abraham’s heart was not at ease? No. Abraham was a believer, but he wanted to increase his heart’s rest because he had begun to think about how the action of raising to life occurs, but he did not know what manner it takes.

So, his heart’s rest was based on his will to know the specific mode, to take him out of the labyrinths of all the different modes he could depict and imagine; and this mode is not something which could be explained in words, but rather would need to be illustrated with a real practical experience: ‘...Take four birds and draw them to yourself....’ This means: cause them to come to you, and hold them to yourself so that you can be sure of the identity of the birds and the form of each bird so that you will not wonder if it is another bird that comes back to you.

Exegetes say that the four birds were a raven, a peacock, a rooster, and a pigeon so that each bird had a different form.

‘...Then [after slaughtering them] put on each hill a portion of them; then call them – they will come to you in haste....’ Did our master Abraham *peace be upon him* actually do this, or was he satisfied with God’s explaining the ‘how’ of it to him? The Quran does not mention this; so, either God told him how it was done, and if he wanted to confirm it, he could do so, or else, he may have been completely convinced without actually doing it. The Quran

does not tell us whether our master Abraham *peace be upon him* actually did it or not. The True Lord says to Abraham about the stages of the experiment, ‘...then call them – they will come to you in haste...’, yet it might be supposed that He would have said, ‘They will come to you flying,’ as the word used in the Arabic text (*sa‘iyan*) implies hasty walking.

How do birds come walking in haste? Birds fly in the sky and in the air, but the True Lord *the Most High* wanted not to leave any room for confusion, so, He said ‘in haste,’ meaning that the birds would come running to him. The True Lord *the Most High* changed it from flying to walking in order that our master Abraham *peace be upon him* could be sure of them: In order that you can be sure, O Abraham, and so that your peace of heart can increase, We brought them forth from different kinds of birds, and you were the one who cut them, and you were the one who put a piece of them on each mountain, and then you were the one who called the birds and they all came to you in haste.

Here there is an illustration of God’s Omnipotent Power, and the difference between the necessary power of the Necessary Being, namely the True Lord *the Most High*, and the power which is given by the Necessary Being, God, to the one who denies the Necessary Being, namely man. This One has Power, and that one has power; yet the Power of God is a necessary power, whilst the power of man is only a possible power; and no one can take God’s power from Him, whilst God can take man’s power from him; for a man is a human being, and the powers of human beings are different from one another so that while one of them has power another of them does not, i.e. he is powerless. The able-bodied human being is able to loan his power to the one who is powerless: the able person might carry a chair for the powerless one to sit in if he cannot carry it himself. But the power of the True Lord *the Most High* is different.

It is as though the True Lord is saying: ‘I loan some of My power to those who are unable so that they become able; I say to the weak: Be able! And so he does.’ This is what we understand from God’s words to Abraham: ‘...then call them – they will come [flying] to you in haste....’ Abraham, as a human being, was unable to know how the dead are raised to life, but the True Lord gave him the power to call the birds so that they would come running to him.

The True Lord gave to Abraham the power to call the birds so that they would come running to him, and this is the difference between Necessary Power and possible power. No one can give the power of a possible being to someone who lacks it, but the Power of the Necessary Being can be given to one who is unable and thereby make him able. This is the perspective of the wise words concerning the special characteristics of Jesus son of Mary *peace be upon him* who was sent as a messenger to the children of Israel to tell them that he has come to them with a message from their Lord. He will create for them out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and then breathe into it so that it will become a bird by God's leave; and he will heal the blind and the leper, and bring the dead back to life by God's leave; and he will tell them what they eat and what they store up in their houses. Indeed, in all this, there is a message to them, if they are truly believers (*Al- 'Imran*: 49).

The special characteristics of Jesus son of Mary only came about by the leave of God: the ability of Jesus *peace be upon him* to make birds from clay, which he then breathed into so that by God's leave, they became real birds, and likewise his healing of the blind and the leper and the raising of the dead to life – all of this was by leave of whom? It was by leave of God.

The same was the case for the experiment of Abraham, which is why the True Lord said to him, '...And know that God is Exalted in Might and Wise.' God is Almighty, meaning that no one can overcome Him; and He is Wise, meaning that He puts everything in its proper place.

In this way, the True Lord explained the story of life and the story of death with a physical experiment so that the heart of our master Abraham would be set at ease; and the story of life and death was mentioned because the doubt of those who lived at the time of the Muhammadan message was centred on the matter of the resurrection of the dead, and all of their words pointed to that, and they found far-fetched the notion that after they have died and become mere dust and bones, they will be raised from the dead (*al-Mu' minun*: 82).

And in another place the Quran tells about man who comes up with arguments about God and forgets how he himself was created. Man asks who could give life to bones that have crumbled to dust. God commands His Messenger to answer that it is He Who brought them into being in the first

instance, will give them life once again: He has full knowledge of every act of creation (*Ya Sin*: 78-79).

The True Lord *the Most High* commanded Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to answer this: Say, O Muhammad, He who brought them into life in the first place will give them life, for He created them before out of nothing. This is the meaning we find in the statement of the True Lord *the Most High* that it is He who creates all life in the first instance and then brings it forth anew; and most easy is this for Him. His is the loftiest example in the heavens and on earth, and He is the Mighty, the Wise (*ar-Rum*: 27).

God *the Most High* is able to begin creation without any prototype, and then, to bring it back after death; and for Him to bring it back would be deemed easier for Him than to begin it, according to the standards of someone who believes that to start something anew is easier than beginning it for God has absolute Power over His creation, and He is the Master in His dominion, and He is All-Wise in His actions and His ordainment.

The one who brings something back only returns what already exists whilst the one who begins something, brings it out of non-being. So the easier task is to bring it back; as for beginning it, this means to begin it from nothing – and both modes are within the power of the True Lord *the Most High*. This matter only confirms the coming of the Last Day because faith in the Last Day is the balance of doctrine; if it settles in the heart and the person knows that he will be brought back to life and held accountable for his deeds in this life, he will direct his whole body towards the acts which are in accordance with the Way of God in order to gain the greatest reward.

When a person understands that there will be a reckoning, and there will be requital, and there will be a resurrection, he knows that he will not be left free in this world, and he will not escape from the One All-Dominant God. Man will return to life, and so we say to the one who is deluded by what God has given him: No, you will not escape from God's Hand, but rather, after you die, you will come back at the Resurrection. When this return settles in the minds of Muslims, everyone will base his prospects on this return.

After the matter of life and death was settled, the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to discuss something which is the fruit of life for living beings, and

the first of the signs of life, namely sensation and movement. God wanted man to have movement in existence because He, the True Lord, wanted man to assume vicegerency on earth, and vicegerency on earth requires man to fill the earth with life, as God *the Most High* reports the teaching of the prophet Saleh *peace be upon him* to his tribe Thamud to worship God as they have no deity other than Him. He brought them into being out of the earth, and made them settle and thrive in it (*Hud*: 61).

Man's vicegerency on earth requires him to work and fill the earth with movement; and when God wanted us to work and fill the earth with life, there must be certain actions which give order to this work, and there must be various arts upon which this thriving is based; and God distributes the active abilities of these various arts and makes them intellectual and artistic talents for mankind. The True Lord did not make a single man embody all faculties, but rather, He *the Exalted* dispersed talents throughout mankind, and everybody took one talent or another.

Why? That was because God wanted the world to be integrative, not repetitive and integration gives rise to amalgamation. If you know something that is within your talents, whilst I do not know it, I therefore will need to be in contact with you; and I also might know something which you do not, so, you will need to be in contact with me; and this kind of contact is not one of superiority or condescension, but rather, it is contact based on essential coexistence.

But if everyone possessed all talents, they would not need any other human being, and everyone would live alone, and no one would need communal life. It is as though when God dispensed the means of good livelihood throughout mankind, He wanted them to integrate and be in contact with one another, not out of condescending relationship but out of essential coexistence; because one person wants that which another can offer him with his talents, and the other wants from someone else that which he is gifted with. Because of this, people are well off as long as they are distinct from one another because each of them needs the other.

This is why we find there is no progress in a society unless the talents in this society are diverse and in integrative collaboration. But when in a people, you find that everybody has the same talents as everybody else, they will inevitably

compete and fight with one another. On the other hand, when everyone needs the talents of someone else, they will coexist because life can only proceed if it does so for everyone. This is why when a group of people have the same talents, they will inevitably annihilate one another because they will compete over means of livelihood, and each one of them, will want to claim them for themselves. But if talents are integrated, no one will say, 'Why is so-and-so better than I?' He will know that it is essential that there are engineers, doctors, as well as labourers. For this reason, you find that the world organises itself naturally in a way that produces a base and a peak – the small peak carried by the large base. If the pyramid were turned upside down, it would become problematic because in this case, it would be weighed down by many sides, and would have no fixed base, and would not be focused on anything. This is why it is wise that if you see that someone in society has arrived to the peak, you help him to stay at the top; do not fight him, or else you will all fall down. There must be comparison so that there can be integration.

The True Lord *the Most High* presents this issue to us here in a sociological and economic fashion in order to show us that the basis of existence must be formed on social and economic grounds. Why? Because man is busy first of all with preserving his life, and then, with preserving his species; the preservation of man is attained by sustenance and nourishment, and the preservation of his species is attained through marriage. The preservation of life by nourishment requires work in life, and the True Lord respects the fruit of this work; and when the True Lord wants to soften the heart of the worker towards his incapable brother, He treats charity towards the incapable as a loan to Himself asking, 'Who is it that will lend to God a goodly loan ...?' (*al-Baqara*: 245).

We gave the example before – and God is beyond compare – saying that a man gives his children pocket-money, which each one of them puts in his money box. Suppose that one of the children needs something urgent like an operation. Upon this, the man goes to his children and says to them, 'Lend me what is in your money boxes because your brother requires an operation, and I will pay you back with extra afterwards.' The father does not take back his gift and say, 'What is in the money-boxes belongs to me, and I will take it;' no; rather he says, 'It is your money, and I will take it as a loan from you.'

This is what God does with mankind, explaining: Some of you are unable and others are able; and I will look after those who are unable, and take a loan from those who are able. It is necessary that some of us are unable so that no one would think that power intrinsically belongs to the human being; no; power is a gift, and the One Who gave it can take it away. In order for the one who has power to know that this power is not intrinsically his, he finds next to him someone else who is powerless. However, this powerless person who shows the powerful one that this power is not intrinsically his: what has he done wrong?

God has made him a means of clarification in existence, as though the True Lord were saying: We will assure for you, incapable person, the appropriate standard of living by means of the fruits of the work of him who is able to work since it is from the fruits of the work of him who is able to work; does this mean that the one who is able to work should work as much as he needs to, or as much as he can? He must work as much as he can because if he only works as much as he needs to work, he will not have anything to give to those who are unable to work.

After having just affirmed the matters of the Resurrection and giving life and dealing death, the True Lord *the Most High* speaks about this important matter of the structure of society and economics so that these things are clear in our minds; and the True Lord *the Most High* then, moves on to clarify to us the nature of Islamic society and economics. He *the Exalted* says:

مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ حَبَّةٍ أَتَتْ سَنَابِلَ
فِي كُلِّ سُبُلَةٍ مِائَةٌ حَبَّةٌ وَاللَّهُ يُضَعِفُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٦١﴾

Those who spend their wealth in God's cause are like grains of corn that produce seven ears, each bearing a hundred grains. God gives multiple increase to whoever He wishes. He is limitless and All Knowing [261] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 261)

God ascribes wealth to those people who work because they have earned this wealth by means of their work. In another place in the Quran, the True Lord instructs the believers to give the needy from the wealth of God that He has given to them (*an-Nur*: 33).

All wealth belongs to God and man obtains it by working. God respects this work, and He respects man's law of benefit, and so He makes the wealth which remains from your work a possession of yours, but if God wants, He will take this wealth; and out of His grace upon man, when He *the Exalted* asks man for some of the wealth which remains from his work, He asks for it as a loan, and He repays it many times over afterwards.

Therefore, God returns what is spent in His Way many times over; and since God does this, it means that what is spent brings increase. Therefore, do not grieve, or fear for your wealth because you have given it to One Who is Omnipotent, fully Capable, Infinite, and All Knowing. He is the True Lord Who is able to give everyone whatever He wills; and He gives according to the intention of the servant, and the amount which he spends on others. This verse deals with the matter of the greed of the human soul; for a person might have something extraneous to his needs, and greedily covet it for himself and be miserly, fearing to spend it, and thus he might lose it.

Here, the perspective of faith says to you: Spend it because He *the Exalted* will give you more, and the True Lord will give to you just as He gives to you from the earth which you farm. You place a single grain in the soil: does it give you only a single grain in return? No; the grain of wheat produces a number of stems, and each stem contains an ear which contains many grains. If the earth, which is a creation of God, multiplies for you what you give to it, will not The One who created it also give to you many times over? If some of God's creations give to you many times over, what do you think of the giving of God *the Most High*?

The inanimate earth, with its constituents, gives to you; when you take a quantity of wheat from your stores to plant it in the earth, is it said that you have reduced your stores by this amount of wheat? No, because you will plant it; and you will see how many grains come from it; this is the inanimate earth which was created by God. If a creation of God can give you seven-hundred grains in return for one, will the One Who created this earth not give you much more than this?

He is bountiful in giving; and the True Lord *the Most High* ascribes to those who spend ownership of the wealth which they spend when He says, 'The

example of those who spend their wealth in the Way of God....' The words 'in the Way of God' are general words, and they could mean the holy struggle (*jihad*), or spending on charity; for all of this is in the Way of God because when the weak person finds himself in a society of mutual solidarity, and finds that those who have strength lend the fruits of their strength and their work to him, will he bear a grudge towards those who have strength? No, because their good will come to him. We have a parable in the countryside: 'When a milk-producing animal is allowed to walk free in the neighbourhood, everyone will pray for her and say, 'May He protect you!' Why? Because her owner gives her milk, cheese and butter to everyone around him, so, they all pray for her; and her owner does not tie her up, or chain her, or worry about her, as the good which comes from her goes to everyone. When we find a society of this form in which the incapable person finds that strong people help him, the incapable person will feel that he is in a cooperative and integrated world.'

And if one person has strength and another suffers from weakness, the weak person will not be resentful but will rather say, 'The good of others will come to me.' Likewise, the one who gives will rest assured that if he becomes incapable one day, he will find those who will take care of him – for power is subject to vicissitudes, and since man is subject to vicissitudes, the one who is strong today, might become weak tomorrow.

So, the words of the True Lord *the Most High* 'The example of those who spend their wealth...' represent a law by which God wants to fight the greed of the human soul. He says to each one of us: Look sagaciously: the earth does not reduce your stores when you give it a measure of wheat; it is true that you remove a measure of wheat from your stores to farm with, but you expect to receive many multiples of it from the earth. Beware of thinking that you can put your trust in what you give to the earth, but that you cannot put your trust in what you give to God.

The example of those who spend their wealth in the Way of God is like a grain which produces seven ears; in each ear is a hundred grains. And God multiplies [His reward] for whom He wills. And God is All-Encompassing and All Knowing (*al-Baqara*: 261). The verse deals with greed and emphasises that charity does not reduce a person's wealth; rather, it gives him even more.

After this, He *the Exalted* says:

الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ لَا يُتَّبِعُونَ مَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْهَا وَلَا
أَذَى لَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٢٦٢﴾

Those who spend their wealth in God's cause, and do not follow their spending with reminders of their benevolence or hurtful words, will have their rewards with their Lord, no fear for them, nor will they grieve [262] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 262)

This is another aspect of charity that the True Lord clarifies here: When you spend your money in God's Way and in the hope of getting God's reward, beware of reminding the one whom you give of your benevolence or hurting his feelings. To stress one's benevolence means for someone to go to the one to whom he has treated kindly and indicate to him that he is indebted to him, and that he has done him a favour; as the poet says:

The one who does me a favour

And reminds me of it a single time is a true niggard!

This is why it is from the manners of faith for a person to forget that he has given, and forget that he has spent, and not to let any of his family see the good he did for a poor person, or the charity he gave him, especially youngsters who do not understand God's reasoning for things: when my son sees me giving something to my neighbour, he might tease the neighbour's son and remind him of our benevolence to him, and he might be so conceited that he insults him; and no one can properly appreciate this matter except someone who is morally responsible and knows the ruling in its context from God.

The True Lord explains to us: Beware of following up your spending on others by reminding them of your benevolence and hurting people's feelings; for if you do, what will the situation be? The one to whom you gave charity will hate it, and he will develop resentment, and hatred. This is why they say, 'Beware the evil of the one for whom you do good,' which they explained as meaning that the way to avoid the evil of this person is not to remind him of the good you did him; beware of reminding him of this good because this will cause him to develop resentment.

This is why you find that many people say something like, 'I did so many favours for so-and-so, this and that, and this and that, and then, they turned around on me and denied it!' I say to everyone who says this: As long as you remember what you did for them – and this means that you were dealing with them not with God, and you had them in mind and not God – it is justice from God that they deny it; if you had acted for the sake of God, they would not have denied it, and since you did not act for the sake of God, you were inviting disavowal of what you spent.

It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* wanted, with the first verse, to soften the heart of the one who spends so that he will spend willingly and generously, so He said, 'Those who spend their wealth in the Way of God and then do not follow up what they have spent with reminders [of it] or [other] injury will have their reward with their Lord, and there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve.'

The True Lord *the Most High* reassured us in the first verse that charity and spending on others do not decrease wealth, but rather, they increase it, and the True Lord gave us the example for this of the earth which repays a single grain with seven hundred grains. Then, the True Lord explains to us that the bane of spending charity is to accompany it with reminding of one's benevolence, or by hurting the feelings of the needy because this will spoil the pure chain of mutual solidarity for the weak and the incapacitated, which is why the True Lord *the Most High* says, 'Those who spend their wealth in the Way of God and then, do not follow up what they have spent with reminders [of it] or [other] injury will have their reward with their Lord....'

Look at the syntactic/semantic precision of the noble expression: '...and then do not follow up what they have spent with reminders [of it] or [other] injury....' It would have been sufficient for the expression to be straight to say, 'They who spend their wealth in the Way of God and then, do not follow up what they have spent with reminders [of it] or [other] injury,' but the True Lord *the Most High* used the word 'then' because it makes an impression here: the one who spends his wealth on others, might not remind them of his benevolence at the time when he gives it, but he might do this later. It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* is alerting every believer: The act of spending on

others must remain unaccompanied by reminding them of it, and the one who spends, must always avoid reminding of his benevolence; he must not only refrain from reminding of his benevolence at the time of giving, but must continue to do this after giving, no matter how much time passes.

The word ‘then’ is used in this way because of the necessity of refraining from reminding of benevolence; the True Lord *the Most High* forbids this mean practice whether immediate or delayed, not only at the time of the giving, but also after the giving. When the ‘Prince of Poets’ Ahmad Shawqi *God rest his soul* wrote verses about carrying heavy burdens, he composed several lines about psychological burdens:

Have you ever borne a debt, even once in your life?

Have you ever borne rancour in your heart?

Have you ever had to bear night and day, repeatedly?

The benevolent boasts of one who did you a favour?

And after enumerating various kinds of burdens of life, Shawqi then says:

This is life, and these are its burdens;

If iron were compared to them, it would come slight.

It is as though reminding of benevolence is a serious psychological burden. The True Lord *the Most High* assures those who spend their wealth in God’s Way without reminding of their charity or hurting the feelings of the needy that they will have a reward with their Lord. The word ‘reward’ – accompanied by the modification that it is with the Lord – is a reassurance that the matter has been turned over to One Who is sure to take care of it, and to One Who is able to do so. As for the one who reminds of his charity, or hurts the feelings of the needy, he takes his reward in this life by boasting of his benevolence, or hurting the feelings of the needy, and he has no reward with God; for the one who reminds of his charity, or hurts the feelings of the needy, has not kept in mind the Lord of the weak, but only the weak.

When the one who spends in God’s Way, keeps in mind the Lord of the weak, and that the Lord of the weak is the One Who called him into existence, and that He sent weakness upon him, he will believe that God is the One Who has undertaken to provide for the weak; and when the strong spends on the

weak, he does this on behalf of God, which is why we find in the sayings of those who are near to God say: 'We place charity into the Hand of God before we place it in the hand of the weak.' Let us consider how our Lady Fatima *God be pleased with her*, the daughter of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon her*, was polishing a coin and perfuming it, and when they asked her what she was doing, she said, 'I am polishing and perfuming the coin because I intend to give it as charity.' They said to her, 'Why will you polish and perfume it if you want to give it as charity?'

Fatima Az-Zahra' *peace and blessings be upon her*, daughter of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, said, 'Because I know that it will fall in God's Hand before it falls into the hand of the needy person.' The reward is with The One Who values it, and raises it, and increases its value, and He is the All-Giving Creator.

Let us reflect on God's words '...and there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve.' Why did God not say, 'No fear will they have'? Because the True Lord wants to explain to us by saying '...and there will be no fear concerning them...' that a third element will become involved here, namely the involvement of a person who makes a show of love to the spender and give him false advice saying, 'Save for the days to come, and save for your children.'

Because of this kind of element, the True Lord says, '...and there will be no fear concerning them...', that is: Beware, O you who have this kind of idea, of interfering in the name of love in order to ensure that your words are heeded; for the one who spends in God's Way will only find bestowal and protection from God. So the one who spends in God's Way has no need to fear; and not only this, but the True Lord also says of those who spend in God's Way without reminding of their benevolence or hurting the feelings of the needy that: '...nor will they grieve.' This means that the True Lord will treat them in such a way that they will rejoice in having given charity, either by its speedily being returned to them, or by their feeling contentment in their souls, or by passive provision; for the problem with people is that they always look for positive provision, that is, man measures his provision by that which is added to his wealth, and does not take passive provision into account; and passive provision is pure blessing.

Suppose that a person's income is fifty pounds, and then God relieves him of possible expenditure that might have reached one hundred pounds, for example by his coming home to find that his son is ill and has a fever; so, God provides the man's heart with tranquillity, and he asks the mother to prepare a cup of tea for the boy and he gives him a tablet of aspirin, and the illness goes and that is how similar matters come to pass.

Another man comes home and finds that his son is ill and has a fever, and the fever lasts for more than a day, so, God casts fear into his heart and all kinds of bad thoughts and worries about the illness come to the man's mind and he carries his son to the doctor and spends fifty, or one hundred pounds.

God healed the first man's son with a penny, whilst He healed the second man's son with numerous pounds. The provision of the first man was passive provision; just as God gives provision in a positive way, He also gives provision in a negative way, i.e. He relieves the need to spend and holds off misfortune. There is a man whose income is one hundred pounds; and God brings expenses to him which need two hundred; and there is another man whose income is fifty pounds, yet God relieves him from expenditure of more than one hundred pounds; so, which state is better?

It is the state of the man whom God relieves from having to spend more than his capability. So people should consider passive provision just as they consider positive provision; and God's words about those who spend in God's Way without reminding any of their benevolence or hurting the feelings of the needy that '...there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve', indicate that God will bring, as a result of spending without reminding of charity or hurting feelings, that which will cause the heart of the believer to rejoice, either by the blessing of provision, or by relieving them of possible expenditure, so, the heart of the believer will say: This is the blessing of the charity I gave. He might give something in charity, so, God withholds and relieves him from something potentially harmful, and the believer's heart will rejoice.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* alerts us to something important, which is that if you cannot do good with your wealth, O believer, then, at least do good with your speech; if you cannot accommodate people with your wealth, then, accommodate them with a kind treatment, as the Messenger of

God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Ward off the Hellfire even with half a date; and if one finds not even this, then with a kind word.'⁽¹⁾ The True Lord *the Most High* spells out the issue in the following verse:

قَوْلٌ مَّعْرُوفٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ صَدَقَةٍ يَتْبَعُهَا أَذًى ۗ وَاللَّهُ غَنِيٌّ حَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٦٣﴾

A kind word and forgiveness is better than a charitable deed followed by hurtful [words]. God is self-sufficient, forbearing [263] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 263)

What does 'Kind speech' mean here? Usually we find the word *ma'roof* (rendered here as 'kind' and which literally means 'known'), used to mean 'conventionally acceptable' and is often used in contrast with the word *munkar*, ('bad/abominable,' which literally means 'rejected/denied/ unacknowledged'). It is as though goodness is something which is naturally acknowledged, and that the things which are naturally acknowledged are always based on beauty and goodness, whilst the things which the soul rejects are based on evil and ugliness, and because of this the True Lord *the Most High* says 'kind (*ma'roof*) speech', as though it is the nature of beauty and goodness to be acknowledged, whilst the nature of their opposites is to be rejected. So 'kind speech' means to turn a beggar down in a nice way so that his soul does not fill with resentment against you, and that you do not censure him for having asked of you; and if the beggar glowers at you as a needy person does, then, forgive him for this. Why? It is because there are people who suffer greatly from need, and one of them might see that you are wealthy or well-off and hope to get some good from your charity and then, he might go a little too far when he speaks to you, and perhaps cross the line of polite speech with you; so you must bear with him.

And you, O servant of God, keep in mind that you commit sins which anger God, and yet, the True Lord treats you with forbearance and patience, forgives your misdeeds, and does not punish you; so, if someone treats you offensively in some way, be also a person of kindness, forgiveness and forbearance, as the True Lord *the Most High* puts the question to us: '...do you not desire that God forgive you?...' (*an-Nur*: 22).

(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari in *Kitab Az-Zakat*

We all desire that God would forgive us, which is why we must forgive other people, especially the needy. When the True Lord says, ‘...And God is Free of need, Forbearing,’ this is a warning to the capable person who refuses to give to the needy, as though He were saying to him: You have only denied yourself, O capable person, the reward of God. O capable person, when you deny the poor, you are the one who is really being denied because God is free of need to you; and He *the Exalted* tells the believers that they are called upon to spend freely in God’s Way; but some of them are niggardly. And whoever acts niggardly is only niggardly towards his own self; for God is free of need, whereas they stand in need; and if they turn away, He will bring other people to take their place, and they will not be the likes of them (*Muhammad*: 38).

God is Free of need by His Omnipotent Power, and He is able to replace miserly people with people who give willingly in God’s Way from the provisions which God has given to them. The one who refuses to give, is only thereby closing the door to mercy upon himself, which is why the True Lord says:

يَتَّيِّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تُبْطِلُوا صَدَقَتِكُمْ بِالْمَنِّ وَالْأَذَى كَالَّذِي يُنْفِقُ مَالَهُ رِثَاءَ النَّاسِ
وَلَا يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَمَثَلُهُ كَمَثَلِ صَفْوَانٍ عَلَيْهِ تُرَابٌ فَأَصَابَهُ وَابِلٌ فَتَرَكَهُ
صَلْدًا لَا يَقْدِرُونَ عَلَى شَيْءٍ مِّمَّا كَسَبُوا وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٢٦٤﴾

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. 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 [264] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 264)

The one who gives charity and then follows it by reminding of his benevolence and hurting the feelings of the needy only nullifies his charity, and his loss is really twofold: the first loss is that he actually decreases his wealth because God will not replace it for him since he nullified his charity by following it by reminding of his benevolence and hurting the feelings of the needy; and the second loss is that he is denied the reward. So the one who spends on others just so that people will say that he did so, should know that

the True Lord explains to us that rewards are given on the premise that the reward is paid by the one for whom you did the deed.

With the limited nature of his power, man gives reward to those who do something for him; and the one who does an action so that people will say he did and he will take his reward from the limited power of man. For this reason, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* told us that the one who does a good deed or gives charity so that it will be said of him that he did it, will come forth on the Day of Resurrection and find there is no reward for him. The Noble Hadith says: ‘... And (there will come) a man to whom God gave all manner of wealth, and he will be brought forth, and He will remind him of His blessings, and he will acknowledge them; then He will say, ‘What did you do with them?’ He will say, ‘I left nothing which You loved for me to spend without spending on it for You.’ He will say, ‘You have lied; you only wanted it to be said that so-and-so is generous; and it indeed was said.’ Then he will be ordered to be taken and dragged on his face until he is cast into Hellfire.’⁽¹⁾

So, beware of saying, ‘I spent on others, but God did not increase my provisions,’ because God might be testing you and trying you. Do not give charity in order to gain more provisions because God does not give to the believer in this worldly life alone; God might not want to give to you in this ephemeral world, but rather to preserve His gift to you in the everlasting world, the Hereafter, which is better and more lasting.

The True Lord says, ‘...and does not believe in God and the Last Day. His example is like that of a [large] smooth stone upon which is a little dust of earth...’ The word *safwan* means a smooth stone, which we call ‘pebble’; and the word *safwan* can also be used to describe a bald man because his head is smooth like a pebble. A smooth rock means one which has no fissures or pores that you can see with the naked eye, but which you can only see by using a microscope. When something is smooth, soil might fall upon it, and then when it rains the soil washes off it and slides off the smooth surface. If the rock has

(1) Part of a Hadith which Al-Hakim declared to be authentic according to the conditions of Al-Bukhari and Muslim; and indeed Muslim narrated it.

some cracks in it, some of the soil will stick in between the cracks. So the one who spends his wealth only to be seen and praised by people is like a smooth stone upon which a little earth builds up, and then when rain falls onto the earth, it is all washed away so that ‘...They are unable [to keep] anything of what they have earned...’ that is, they will lose the ability to possess anything because God will make all their actions like dust scattered in the wind.

These people are like the smooth rock upon which there is a little earth which is then washed off by a rainstorm, that is, by heavy rain which leaves it bare; these are the attributes of those who spend their wealth only to be seen and praised by men so that God nullifies their reward, for God does not allow them to attain goodness and reward. God then gives their opposite, namely those who spend their wealth out of a longing to please God, saying:

وَمَثَلُ الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ ابْتِغَاءَ مَرْضَاتِ اللَّهِ وَتَثْبِيْتًا مِّنْ
أَنْفُسِهِمْ كَمَثَلِ جَنَّتٍ بِرَبْوَةٍ أَصَابَهَا وَابِلٌ فَثَلَّتْ أَكْلَهَا
ضَعْفَيْنِ فَإِن لَّمْ يُصِبْهَا وَابِلٌ فَطَلَّ ۖ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٢٦٥﴾

But those who spend their wealth in order to gain God’s approval, and as an affirmation of their own faith, are like a garden on a hill: heavy rain falls and it produces double its normal yield; even if no heavy rain falls, it will still be watered by the dew. God sees all that you do [265]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 265)

Seeking God’s pleasure in spending means removing any ostentation in the soul from the act of spending so that it is sincerely devoted to Him Alone. As for their own inner strength, it is also for themselves; it is as though the faithful part of the soul clashes with the libidinal part, and when the faithful part of the soul seeks anything, the libidinal part seeks to prevent it; and the faithful part of the soul overcomes the libidinal part and seeks to gain victory for God’s sake.

The meaning of ‘...the strengthening of their souls...’ is that the believer affirms that he loves his own self with a deep love, not a foolish love. The act of spending on others must first of all be spending in God’s Way, and the believer strengthens his soul first of all by giving his blood, and secondly by

giving his wealth; and in this way, inner strength is affirmed, so, the likeness of it is, as the noble verse depicted it: ‘...a garden on high ground which is hit by a downpour – so, it yields its fruits twofold. And [even] if it is not hit by a downpour, then, a drizzle [falls upon it]. And God, of what you do, is Seeing.’

As we know, the word ‘garden’ (*janna*) means the place in which there are thick green plants so that it conceals those who are within it; from the same root is derived the word *jann* which means ‘cover’, so, those who enter this garden are covered. The True Lord wants to give us a parable to illustrate the second group of those who spend in God’s Way, out of a longing to please Him and to strengthen the faithful part of their souls against the libidinal part; one of them is like one who enters a garden of thick plants, and this garden is on high, fertile ground; and when a garden is on high fertile ground, this means that it is surrounded by areas which are lower-lying than it. So what will the rain do to the garden if it is on high fertile ground? The True Lord tells us what would happen to a garden like this before modern science developed and discovered the effects which ground water has on crops.

This garden on high ground does not suffer from what flat lands suffer from: on flat lands, ground water can go down to the roots of crops and cause them to rot by drowning them so that these roots cannot absorb the necessary nutrients, and thus the plants first become pale and then die. The garden which lies on high ground, accepts the water which falls upon it as rain, and it is surrounded by ditches which drain the water down to the low-lying lands around it; and this garden is irrigated by the most modern form of irrigation to which modern science has arrived: it takes water from above, i.e. from rain, and the water falls on the leaves to perform a primary function, which is to wash the leaves.

As we know, plant leaves are like lungs for people, and their function is to breathe, and when rainwater falls on them it washes the leaves to allow them to play their part in the process known today as photosynthesis. After this, the water reaches the roots in order to absorb the essential elements in the soil to give nutrition to the plants, and the roots take what they need of the nutrients absorbed in the water, and the extra water flows down the ditches to the lower ground. This is the most modern of all current farming techniques, and they have discovered that yields are doubled by it.

The True Lord is telling us that he who spends his wealth out of a desire to please God and to strengthen their inner souls are like this kind of garden, which is irrigated by Divine means so that if a downpour hits it, it takes what it needs from it and the rest of the rain flows off it; ‘...And [even] if it is not hit by a downpour, then a drizzle [falls upon it]....’ Drizzle (tall) means light and soft rain, and this is enough for it to give its produce twofold (*di‘fayn*, which literally means ‘two doubles’). If a double means that which is equal to two times of something, then, two doubles are equal to four times of it.

God *the Most High* then gives us another example to clarify more the state of the person who spends his wealth ostentatiously; He asks His believing servants, and He knows them best, saying:

أَيُّودُ أَحَدُكُمْ أَنْ تَكُونَ لَهُ جَنَّةٌ مِّنْ نَّخِيلٍ وَأَعْنَابٍ تَجْرَى مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ لَهُ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ وَأَصَابَهُ الْكِبَرُ وَلَهُ ذُرِّيَّةٌ ضِعْفُهُ فَأَصَابَهَا إِعْصَارٌ فِيهِ نَارٌ فَاحْتَرَقَتْ كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ الْآيَاتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

Would any of you like to have a garden of palm trees and vines, graced with flowing streams and all kinds of produce, which, when you are afflicted with old age and feeble offspring, is struck by a fiery whirl- wind and burnt down? In this way God makes His messages clear to you, so that you may reflect on them [266] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 266)

The True Lord *the Most High* includes us in the image, as though He wants us to take a clear picture from it. Would any of you like to have a garden of date palms and grape vines, through which running rivers flow, and have all kinds of fruit grow therein; and we know that dates and grapes were two of the most important fruits and products of the society in which the Noble Quran was first revealed; and we know that there are gardens in which there are date palms and grape vines, to which their owners add peach trees and other fruit trees, and this is similar to the situation that the True Lord describes about the owner of the two gardens, upon one of which God had bestowed two vineyards and surrounded them with date palms, and placed a field of grain in between. Each of the two gardens yielded its produce and never failed therein

in any way, and God had made a stream to gush forth in the midst of each of them. And so the owner had fruit in abundance. One day he said to his friend, in conversation with him, 'I have more wealth than you, and I am mightier in terms of followers.' And having thus sinned against himself, he entered his garden, saying, 'I do not think that this will ever perish; and neither do I think that the Last Hour will ever come. But even if it should come, and I am brought before my Lord, I will surely find something even better than this as my last resort' (*al-Kahf*: 32-36).

The two gardens here contained many different things: they had grapevines, and in addition God gave to them both date-palms, and then grain; and in Arabic rhetoric this is called 'adding the general to the specific, or adding the specific to the general,' in order to mention the thing twice, once generally and once specifically for emphasis. When the True Lord *the Most High* speaks about the Garden/Paradise of the Hereafter, He says that God has readied for the believers who struggle in His Way gardens underneath which running rivers flow, therein to remain forever; this is the great triumph (*at-Tawba*: 89).

God has prepared for those who believe in Him, those who fight for the cause of His religion and for raising His word, gardens underneath which rivers flow, and this is the supreme triumph and bliss. And in another place, the True Lord speaks about the Garden/Paradise of the Hereafter by saying that He has prepared it for those who led the way, the first of the *Muhajirun* (Migrants from Mecca) and the *Ansar* (who supported the religion in Medina), and those who have followed them in their noble conduct, whom God is well pleased with them, and they with Him – He has made ready for them gardens under which the rivers flow, to abide therein forever: this is the great triumph (*at-Tawba*: 89).

The discourse about the rivers which flow underneath the gardens contains in one place the Arabic particle *min*, which literally means 'from', whilst in the other verse there is no use of this particle. When the discourse about these rivers which flow through the gardens uses the particle *min*, this implies that their flowing is intrinsically theirs, and that their liquid state belongs to them.

And when the discourse about these rivers which flow underneath the gardens does not use the particle *min*, this means that the flowing of these

rivers is not intrinsically theirs, but rather that, they flow through them by the will of God; so, no one could dare to hold back the flow of the water from this garden which God has prepared for the believers.

Returning to the verse at hand, God includes us in the debate posing the question: ‘Would one of you like to have a garden of palm trees and grapevines underneath which rivers flow in which he has from every fruit, but he is afflicted with old age and has weak offspring, and it is hit by a whirlwind containing fire and is burned? Thus does God make clear to you [His] signs that you might give thought?’

The garden is in the condition which is described here, and it contains a great amount of goodness; but its owner has grown old, and he no longer has the health and vigour of youth. He is surrounded by goodness, and he needs this goodness more than ever because he has grown old and no longer has the energy to work. Because of this, his soul is attached to the produce of this garden, not only for himself, but also for his weak offspring. This is the quintessential image of the need for goodness, not only for oneself, but also for one’s weak offspring.

We are here presented with a man who is surrounded by three conditions:

The first condition is the garden which contains all kinds of goodness;

The second condition is old age, weakness and the inability to work;

The third condition is the children, who are weak.

Then a fiery whirlwind smites the garden and it is scorched; so, what will the scale of the loss be for this man? It will be a severe loss; and this is the loss of the one who does good deeds in order to be seen and praised by people. A whirlwind, as we know, is a strong wind accompanied by thunder, lightning and rain, and it might cause fires if electrical charges are caused by clashing clouds, or if the wind is carrying with it burning brands cast up by a blazing conflagration. This is the state of the one who spends on others in order to be seen and praised by people: a hopeful start, but a hopeless end.

So, every believing person must remember when he spends, this beginning which inspires desire, and this ending filled with despair. It is a severe disaster, which a poet described by saying:

When the night was done, I became as one

Who clutches onto water, which slips through his fingers.

And another said:

As though a cloud came over people desperate for rain,

But when they saw it, it dissolved and cleared.

The one who does things so that others will see and praise him thereby,
ruins all his credits, and will have no gain from all that he has done.

The True Lord then says:

يَتَّأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَنْفِقُوا مِنْ طَيِّبَاتِ مَا كَسَبْتُمْ وَمِمَّا
أَخْرَجْنَا لَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ وَلَا تَيَمَّمُوا الْخَبِيثَ مِنْهُ تُنْفِقُونَ وَلَسْتُمْ
بِعَاذِيهِ إِلَّا أَنْ تُغْمِضُوا فِيهِ ۚ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ غَفِيرٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٢٦٧﴾

**You who believe, give charitably from the good things you
have acquired and that We have produced for you from the
earth. Do not give away the bad things that you yourself
would only accept with your eyes closed: remember that
God is self-sufficient, worthy of all praise [267]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 267)**

This verse depicts things which take place in human society, and these things were going on in Medina after the Messenger of God had established the Islamic state there. Some people used to take bunches of dates from date-palms and hang them in the mosque so that anyone who wanted could eat from them, and a bunch means a large branch of a date-palm containing many small stalks from which fresh dates hang. But some people would bring unripe bunches, or dates of inferior quality, and God wanted them to stop doing this so that they would not dedicate to God that which they themselves disliked; therefore He revealed these wise words: ‘O you who have believed, spend from the good things which you have earned....’

Spending on others must be out of good, lawful possessions; do not obtain money from an unlawful source and spend it on good causes because God is

Good and He accepts only that which is good, and spending on others should not be from base and ill-gotten wealth.

The True Lord *the Most High* specifies the means of spending from His provision, saying, ‘...and from that which We have brought forth for you from the earth...’ and He reminds us always, when He says ‘...Spend from the good things which you have earned...’, that we should not think that earning is the source of provision; no; earning is an act which is given to you by God. As a servant, you can only work because of the energy given to you by God, and the reasoning given to you by God, and upon the earth which God has subjugated for you. It is down to the many tools which God has specially bestowed upon you, none of which you possess intrinsically; but the True Lord respects man’s work and effort to earn provision, so He says, ‘...Spend from the good things which you have earned....’

The True Lord *the Most High* warns us not to choose the defective and the inferior things of our labour’s produce to spend in charity when He says, ‘...And do not seek the defective therefrom to spend [from that in charity]...’ that is, it is not right and not appropriate that we take for ourselves the good things we earn and offer to God the base and bad things because none of us would be happy to feed himself, or his family on those bad things which are unsuitable for us to spend, or consume ourselves: ‘...while you would not take it [yourself] except with closed eyes. And know that God is Free of need and worthy of all praise.’ That is, as a believing servant you would not be content to eat these bad things without averting your eyes in disdain or without its price being lowered for you, such as if the seller offers you something of middle or low quality for a lower price than that of the high quality produce.

The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to elucidate for us these depictions of the aspects of spending:

- Spending does not reduce wealth, but rather increases it seven hundred-fold;
- It is not right for a person to nullify his spending by reminding of his benevolence, or hurting the feelings of the needy;

- A kind word is better than a charitable deed which is followed by reminding of one's benevolence, or hurt;
- Spending must not be for the sake of gaining the praise of others, but rather must be done out of a desire to please God.

These noble verses deal with the things which spoil the act of spending in charity, whether greed, reminding of one's benevolence, hurting other's feelings, spending to show off in front of others, or spending from one's inferior possessions. After this, He *the Exalted* says:

الشَّيْطَانُ يَعِدُكُمُ الْفَقْرَ وَيَأْمُرُكُمْ بِالْفَحْشَاءِ وَاللَّهُ يَعِدُكُمْ
مَغْفِرَةً مِنْهُ وَفَضْلًا وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ

Satan threatens you with the prospect of poverty and commands you to do foul deeds; God promises you His forgiveness and His abundance. God is limitless and All Knowing [268] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 268)

Satan might whisper to you that spending will make you poor, trying to prevent you from spending on good causes and tempt you into acts of sin and disobedience. When a rich person refuses to spend on the needy, the needy person's heart is filled with resentment; and if the heart of any society is filled with resentment, we will find that all manner of evil will spread therein. The True Lord treats this issue by stressing that the life of this world is but play and a passing delight; but if you believe in God and fear Him, He will grant you your recompense; and He does not demand of you to sacrifice in His Way all of your possessions as if He were to demand of you all of them, and urge you, you would niggardly cling to them, and so He would but bring out your moral failings (*Muhammad*: 36-37).

The True Lord *the Most High* does not ask you to return all the wealth He has given you, He only asks you to purify this wealth by spending some of it in God's Way in order that it grows and increases, and in order to remove resentment from society; for when resentment enters a society, the society will be overwhelmed by it, and this society will not awake from this resentment unless it

is shaken by a strong blow which wakes it up to the need to expel resentment from itself. This is why God warns us not to listen to Satan: ‘Satan threatens you with poverty and orders you to immorality, while God promises you forgiveness from Him and bounty; and God is All-Encompassing, All Knowing.’

The one who listens to Satan’s words and promises and does not listen to God’s promises, will become as one who has supported God’s enemy against God – may God save us and you from such a position! Satan whispers to you that you will become poor if you spend; and man’s experience with Satan confirms to him that Satan is a misleading liar; and man’s experience with faith in God confirms to him that God is full of forgiveness, and He gives generously to His servants; and wisdom requires us to know which way to follow and adhere to.

After this, the True Lord says:

يُؤْتِي الْحِكْمَةَ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَنْ يُؤْتَ الْحِكْمَةَ فَقَدْ أُوتِيَ خَيْرًا
كَثِيرًا وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّا أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ ﴿٣١﴾

and He gives wisdom to whoever He will. Whoever is given wisdom has truly been given much good, but only those with insight bear this in mind [269] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 269)

Wisdom means to put things in their appropriate beneficial places. It is as though the True Lord is saying: Everything I have commanded you to do is wisdom itself because I want to safeguard your worldly lives for those weak offspring whom you will leave behind, and I want to safeguard felicity for you in the Hereafter. So if the believing servant does what God commands him to do, this is putting things in their rightful places, and he would have therefore attained wisdom.

The True Lord wanted to teach man by means of the emotion he feels for his children; for a person might go through times when his own self is of little importance to him, and he is concerned for nothing but his children’s affairs. He might go hungry so that his children can eat, and go unclothed in order to clothe them. We have a clear example in our master Abraham *peace be upon him*, the Friend of the Most Merciful: his Lord tested him at the beginning of his

life by his being burnt in a fire; and because Abraham's faith was strong, God made the fire cool and peaceful.

Towards the end of his life, God tested him with a vision of the sacrifice of his son; and because Abraham's faith was great, he obeyed the commandment of the Most Merciful, Who ransomed Ishmael with a tremendous ram. When a person reaches later life, he becomes more attached to his children than to his own self; and in this way, God advanced His testing of our master Abraham *peace be upon him*, which is why God wanted to touch this sensitive spot of mankind, instructing those [executors and guardians] to fear [injustice] as if they [themselves] had left weak offspring behind and feared for them. So let them fear God and speak words of appropriate justice (*an-Nisa'*: 9). The True Lord *the Most High* wants His servants to safeguard their children by doing good deeds and speaking in a just manner.

Another example on how the True Lord protects the wealth of orphans is: In the story of Moses *peace be upon him* with the righteous servant to whom God had granted special knowledge, we learn that the two went on, till when they came upon some village people, they asked them for food, but those people refused to give them hospitality. And they saw in that village a wall which was on the point of tumbling down, and he erected it, so, Moses protested that had he wished, he surely could have obtained some payment for it (*al-Kahf*: 77).

Moses *peace be upon him* did not know what the righteous servant knew that beneath the wall was a treasure belonging to two orphaned boys whose father had been a man of virtue whilst the people of this village were so mean that they refused to give some food to the righteous servant and Moses *peace be upon him*, which is why it was necessary to erect the wall so that the treasure would not be uncovered in this town of villains who would take it for themselves, preventing the orphans from inheriting the treasure of their father who was a righteous man. So, the True Lord *the Most High* teaches us to ensure the wellbeing of our children by means of performing righteous actions; and this is wisdom itself, which cannot be attained except by those who have minds capable of penetrating the depths of sound thought.

Our master Al-Hasan Al-Basri gives us an example of righteous action when he said to someone who came to him seeking help, 'Welcome to him who

comes to carry my supply to the Hereafter free of charge!’ Our master Al-Hasan Al-Basri was given wisdom that made him view goodness not according to its time, but rather, according to what it would bring at a later time.

I gave the example before of the student who works hard and strives in his studies in order to succeed, while his brother loves to relax and laze around; then we find that the student who worked hard is the one who ascends in society whilst the one who was content to be lazy, becomes a wretch in the society.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَمَا أَنْفَقْتُمْ مِنْ نَفَقَةٍ أَوْ نَذَرْتُمْ مِنْ نَذْرٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ
يَعْلَمُهَا وَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ أَنْصَارٍ ﴿٢٧٠﴾

**Whatever you may give, or vow to give, God knows it well, and
those who do wrong will have no one to help them [270]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 270)**

We know about spending from before, but what is a vow? A vow means that you bind yourself to undertake some supererogatory act of worship of a kind which God has ordained but which is above that which He has prescribed. If you vow to pray a given number of *rak'as* (cycles) of prayer every night, this is a vow to do something of a kind which God has ordained since God ordained prayer and made five prayers obligatory, and if you vow to do more than what God made obligatory, this is what a ‘vow’ means. It is said of someone who vows to do something of a kind which God has ordained, but which is above that which He has prescribed, that this is a sign that worship has become sweet for him, and he loves it and yearns for it, and it is a sign that he is close to acknowledging the true due of his Lord, and that his Lord deserves more from him than what He has obliged him to do; it is as though God was merciful with us in what He obliged us to do because had He obliged us to do all that He deserves, none of us would have been able to offer Him His due.

So, when you make a vow, O believing servant, you bind yourself to do something of a kind which God has ordained, but which is above that which He has imposed on you. You have the free choice as to whether to make a vow, or not, but once you have made a vow, it becomes binding. Why? Because you

have bound yourself to it, which is why it is prudent for one not to overburden oneself by making numerous vows; for when the time comes to fulfil them, he might not be able to do them.

Close worshippers of God would say to the one who leaves off a vow after having made it: 'Have you tried out your Lord and found that He is not worthy of your continued devotion?' And there is not one of us who would dare to assert this – because God is worthy of the deepest devotion. This is why it is better for a person to consider carefully before he vows to do something.

Let us pause to consider the concluding part of this verse: '...And for the wrongdoers there are no helpers.' The wrongdoers are those who wrong themselves because the True Lord tells us that a person's wrongdoing only harms himself, asserting that God does not do the least wrong to men, but it is men who wrong themselves (*Yunus*: 44).

One of the most severe ways to wrong oneself is to spend on others in order to be seen and praised by people, or to spend on sinful things, or to fail to live up to a vow; and those who do these things shall have no helpers to defend them from God's punishment in the Hereafter.

The True Lord then says:

إِنْ تَبْدُوا الصَّدَقَاتِ فَنِعِمَّا هِيَ وَإِنْ تُخْفُوهَا وَتُؤْتُوهَا الْفُقَرَاءَ فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ
لَكُمْ وَيُكَفِّرْ عَنْكُمْ مِنْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ﴿٢٧١﴾

If you give charity openly, it is good, but if you keep it secret and give to the needy in private, that is better for you, and it will atone for some of your bad deeds. God is well aware of all that you do [271]

(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 271)

If you openly give charity, what you do is good, as you are thereby giving a good example for others, and you keep resentment away from society. And if you secretly give charity and give it to the poor, God will expiate some of your sins by means of it; and God is aware of the intention behind making charity public or making it secret; and the conclusion of this noble verse serves both the principle of giving charity openly and the principle of giving it

secretly. The True Lord knows the intention of the one who gives charity openly; if one is rich, one should give charity openly in order to protect his honour from people casting aspersions on it; for when people know that someone is rich, they must also know how this rich person spends on others; otherwise they might count the wealth that God has given to him without counting how he spends in God's cause. Why? Because God wants to protect people's honour from other people's tongues.

As for it if a person is not known to be rich, it is better that he conceal his charitable acts; and if you give charity publicly in order that people follow your example, as I said, not in order that they see you and praise you, this is also desirable. The True Lord says, '...And God, with what you do, is fully Acquainted,' that is, God rewards according to the intention of the servant for giving openly or secretly.

By examining the verses which concern spending, we find that He *the Exalted* blocks for the human soul all the avenues to avarice, and cuts off for it all the pretexts it might use to be stingy with what God has given it; and the Creator Who gave the creature what He gave him, requires him to spend. If we consider the matter from the perspective of logic, we find that it is perfectly natural because God does not ask His creatures to spend from what they have created, but rather, He asks them to spend from what He has created for them.

In this existence, when man is asked as an act of faith to spend, this means that he must have something to spend; and he can only have something to spend if he owns that which is beyond his need and the need of his dependents, and this can only come through the fruits of labour. So God's command to the believer to spend, requires that He first commands him to work as best he can, not only as much as he needs to; if every person who could work only worked as much as they needed to, how could those who were unable to work, find the essentials of life? So, the True Lord wants us to work to our full capability in order to be able to support ourselves and those who are in our care, and if we have something more than this, we give it to those who are unable to work.

Someone might say, 'If God wanted to make the hearts of those who spend feel compassion for those who are incapable, why did He not just make the incapable people capable of working as well?' To the one who says this we

say: When the True Lord created, He created a universe that is complementary and in harmony, and to which the means of life yielded; and it might happen that man becomes filled with feelings of intransigence and haughtiness by the way the means obey him, and he might believe that he is the originator of all things; when the earth responds to him when he ploughs and sows, and the water responds to him when he lowers his pail, and when all the means respond to him, he might believe that he is the essential element of the universe. So God's will is to make the power which acts upon the means to make them produce – His will is to make this power one of the contingencies of this universe, and not to make it one of man's essential elements; so, sometimes you find that he is capable, whilst at other times, he is incapable. Were man to be intrinsically capable, there would be no incapable people; so, the presence of people who are incapable of working in life alerts people to the fact that they are not essential elements in this universe, and that the One Who gave them ability, can take it from them and return it to others so that the one who was incapable yesterday, becomes capable today, and the one who was capable yesterday, becomes incapable today. In this way, man continues to be aware of the granting power which made him God's vicegerent on earth.

This is why the difference between the believer and the disbeliever in terms of work in life is that they are united in one thing, and then, the believer is unique in another: they are united in that both believers and disbelievers work with life's means in order to obtain sustenance for themselves and their dependants, and this is something shared by the believer and the disbeliever; and the disbeliever restricts himself to this means of work, working only for himself and his dependants.

But the believer shares this aspect with him, and then he goes further in that he works for something else, which is to earn something extra which he can offer to those who are unable to work, hoping for reward for this from God. For this reason, we said before that when the True Lord *the Most High* spoke about almsgiving, he spoke about it once as being required to be paid, and He spoke about it another time as something which is required as a goal; He describes spenders as those who are doers of alms deeds (*al-Mu'minun*: 4); He did not say 'those who pay the alms.' The believers do not work for the purpose of paying the alms, rather,

they work as much as they can to support themselves and their dependants, and then to earn something extra with which they can pay the alms.

Of alms giving, the True Lord *the Most High* also said, ‘And perform prayer and give *zakat* (alms), and whatever good you put forward for yourselves, you shall find it with God. Indeed, God sees what you do’ (*al-Baqara*: 110). So, the upshot is that the poor-due is something which the believer has in mind when he begins any work, and by this Divine command the poor-due becomes required as a goal; and it is one of the Pillars of Islam by which the believer is distinguished from the disbeliever.

When the True Lord *the Most High* presented the sources of stinginess in the human soul, He explained that the first thing to which the human soul is exposed is that man fears to spend because it will decrease his possessions; and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* warned against stinginess when he said, ‘Beware of injustice, for injustice will become darkness on the Day of Resurrection; and beware of stinginess, for stinginess destroyed those who were before you, driving them to the point where they shed their blood and violated their prohibitions.’⁽¹⁾ This is the case, but the True Lord *the Most High* explains to every believer that it might decrease what you have, but it will give you more from what God has; if it decreases the fruit of your labour, it completes it by what God then, does for you; and when it completes the fruit of your labour by what God does for you, you must stop and compare a power which is incapable and is created with a power which is creating and omnipotent.

He *the Exalted* draws our attention to one of His creations, the earth - the earth in which we place a single grain – that is, a single seed – from which it gives us in return seven ears, each ear containing a hundred grains. If one looks at first to what he puts into the earth when he ploughs and sows, as a reduction of his stores, he would have never sowed or planted, but he looked at the seven hundred grains which the earth gives him in return for his single grain; this is why he set about planting and ploughing without any reservations: it will give him back many times more than what he gave. If the earth which is a creature of God, gives this much, how much will the Creator of the earth give?

(1) Narrated by Muslim.

‘The example of those who spend their wealth in the Way of God is like a grain which produces seven ears; in each ear is a hundred grains. And God multiplies [His reward] for whom He wills. And God is All-Encompassing and All Knowing’ (*al-Baqara*: 261) So, by this example, the True Lord blocked one of the avenues for stinginess to the human soul. Something else which these verses touches upon is that a person might be disturbed in his society by a beggar who asks of him, and because of his desire to keep his wealth, he is reluctant to spend, yet, because of his desire to safeguard his reputation in the community, he is reluctant to refuse, and he therefore gives, but does so grudgingly; and perhaps his grumbling might cross the line into chiding and rebuking the one who asked of him; so, in order to treat this kind of situation, the True Lord *the Most High* said, ‘Kind speech and forgiveness are better than charity followed by injury. And God is Free of need, Forbearing’ (*al-Baqara*: 263).

God’s words ‘Kind speech and forgiveness...’ (*al-Baqara*: 263) indicate that the one who is asked, must have been vexed by the beggar’s request, and annoyed by the embarrassment it caused him, and the True Lord asks this person to forgive the one who asks him this offence, if he considers his request to be a misdeed: Kind speech and forgiveness are better than charity followed by injury. And God is Free of need, Forbearing (*al-Baqara*: 263).

After this, the True Lord turns to the matter of the spender reminding the receiver of his charity of his generosity towards him which spoils the act of giving because it puts the recipient in a position of degradation and humiliation, and the giver wants to assume the position of the pride of the giver and the haughty spender. So God tells the spender: If you do this, the benefit of your charity will go to the hands of the other so he will benefit, whilst you will be the loser because you will benefit nothing from this where the one who asks, will benefit from it. So for your own sake, do not follow up your acts of charity by reminding of your benevolence, or hurting the feelings of the recipient.

Then, the True Lord comes to treat another one of the avenues of stinginess to the human soul which is that a person might like to give, but when he stretches his hand out to give, he finds it difficult to spend from the good things he possesses, so, he keeps them for himself and then, takes the things which he would be glad to part with and gives them away as charity; and He

the Exalted warns us against doing this by saying, ‘...And do not seek the defective therefrom to spend [from that in charity] while you would not take it [yourself] except with closed eyes...’ (*al-Baqara*: 267).

That is, if such a thing were given to you, you would only accept it whilst averting your eyes and reluctantly tolerating to take it, as though you do not want to look at its flaws as you take it. If you would not accept something for yourself, it is not right that you should accept it for someone else.

Then, after speaking about the avenues for stinginess to the human soul, the Quran then showed us that the one who opens these avenues and maintains them is none other than Satan: ‘Satan threatens you with poverty and orders you to immorality, while God promises you forgiveness from Him and bounty; and God is All-Encompassing, All Knowing’ (*al-Baqara*: 268).

If you see Satan’s threat as being equal to God’s promise to you of goodly acceptance, this will be a great loss and a misfortune for you; so, revise your faith; and you need to see the threat of Satan as obliterated before God’s promise to you of forgiveness and bounty.

After this, He spoke of the time of charity and the form of giving it – whether public or private – and the intention you have is the criterion for preferring one act to another: if you are a rich man, protect your honour from being called into disrepute by people, and give the prescribed alms charity publicly to safeguard your honour from people’s gossiping; and if you want to give extra supererogatory charity, there is nothing to stop you from concealing it so that your left hand does not know what your right hand has given. It is related that Ibn Abbas *God be pleased with them* said, ‘Giving voluntary acts of charity privately is seventy times better than giving it publicly; and giving prescribed charity publicly is twenty-five times better than giving it privately.’

It is as though God has opened the way of the human soul to all the avenues of giving, and blocked up all the avenues of stinginess. Consider, after this, how the True Lord protects the weak believers by placing them in the care of the strong believers. Know, as a believing servant, that when you receive a ruling from God, do not think that it will be required from you always; but rather, you must receive the ruling as though it might become

required for your benefit due to the vicissitudes of time; if you are rich, do not think that God will always be asking of you, but rather bear in mind that if the vicissitudes of life make it so you become poor, the ruling will be required for your benefit. Consider that just as the ruling is required from you now because you are rich, it may well be required from others for your benefit if vicissitudes should befall you and make you poor.

So, legislation is both for you and upon you; do not think then that it is always upon you because if you consider that it is always upon you, you thereby detach yourself from the vicissitudes of life; and the vicissitudes of life are in motion, and no one can free himself from them. This is why He *the Exalted* commands the believer to look after his fellow believer.

Consider the ambitions for faith in the human soul, even in the case of those who do not share your faith. If you are required to give obligatory charity to your fellow believer, it is also required from you to give voluntarily to those who are not believers. This is a distinction of Islam which is not found in other religions, which is that it protects the non-believer; for this reason, the True Lord says:

لَيْسَ عَلَيْكَ هُدَاهُمْ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا
مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلَا تُنْفِسْكُمْ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ وَجْهِ اللَّهِ وَمَا
تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ يُؤَفَّ إِلَيْكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تُظْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٧٢﴾

It is not for you [Prophet] to guide them; it is God who guides whoever He will. Whatever charity you give benefits your own soul, provided you do it for the sake of God. Whatever you give will be repaid to you in full, and you will not be wronged [272] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 272)

What is the root of this matter? The root of this matter is that some of the first people to embrace Islam had relatives who had not done so, and these relatives were poor, and the Muslims would have liked to give these poor relatives some of their wealth, but they were reluctant to do so without first asking the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* about it, which they did.

Qutayla, mother of Asma' *God be pleased with her* daughter of Abu Bakr *God be pleased with him*, was still a disbeliever at the time, and Asma' *God be pleased with her*

asked the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* for permission to give some of her wealth to her mother so that she could live and have sustenance. Upon this, the True Lord *the Most High* revealed His ruling: ‘Not upon you is [responsibility for] their guidance, but God guides whom He wills....’

It is narrated that Asma’ bint Abu Bakr *God be pleased with them* relates, ‘My mother came to me during the time of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and she was still a pagan, so, I asked the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, ‘My mother has come to me pleading her need, so, can I keep ties with my mother?’ He replied, ‘Yes, keep ties with your mother.’⁽¹⁾ Some of the believers thought of refusing to give to their relatives who had not yet believed to push them to belief, but the Most Merciful and Dispenser of Mercy sent down the noble words: ‘Not upon you is [responsibility for] their guidance, but God guides whom He wills....’

It is the sublime religion, a religion which wants us to support the creatures on earth from Lordly bestowal even if they do not join with us in Divine bestowal; for Divine Bestowal is to command moral responsibility, whilst Lordly Bestowal is to provide and instruct.

Everyone on earth needs to be provided for and instructed because we know that no one in the whole world called himself into existence, but rather, his Creator called him forth; and as long as the Most Generous Creator is the One Who called forth His servant, whether believer or disbeliever, He has undertaken to provide for him. Provision is one thing, and belief in God is another, and therefore the True Lord says, ‘Not upon you is [responsibility for] their guidance, but God guides whom He wills....’

In an alternative interpretation of the verse at hand, we say that when the verse which encouraged spending was revealed, perhaps some people were hesitant, and perhaps some of the believers only gave away the less valuable of their possessions.

If Islam came to confront the human soul with all of its different states and notions, it is not surprising that it should attempt to cure them of this kind of behaviour and correct them if a notion came to them which adversely

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

affected their conduct as believers. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* loved it when any command was sent down that the believers immediately accepted it keenly; and if he saw any reluctance or neglect in this regard, he would be saddened; so, God explained things to him: Your responsibility is to convey to them God's command to spend; after that, it is not your responsibility to make them obey. 'Not upon you is [responsibility for] their guidance, but God guides whom He wills....'

Someone might say: 'As long as God is the One who guides, we must leave people as they are, whether they are believers or disbelievers, and all we have to do is convey the message.' We say to those who have this opinion: 'Pay attention to utterances of the Quran concerning one thing, which is the thing we are currently examining, namely guidance. Let us consider all the verses which mention this, and we will find that those who consider that guidance is only from God, and that He does not have the right to punish a sinner, have their point of view; and those who say that He *the Exalted* does have the right to punish them because He has given them free will, also have a point of view; so, what is the point of view which will allow us to understand both sides of this matter?

When the True Lord *the Most High* speaks in His Quran, His revealed Word, He asks us to meditate on it and try to understand it; and the meaning of *tadabbur* ('meditating'/'trying to understand') is that we do not just look at the face of the text, but we try to look at what lies behind the text – or read between the lines so to speak (*tadabbur* literally means 'to look at the back of something'); that is, do not just look at the face, but look at what lies opposite to the face, namely the back. We find this instruction in God's words encouraging people to meditate and try to understand this Quran (*an-Nisa'*: 82).

Now, for the issue at hand: guidance: About the tribe of Thamud, the True Lord *the Most High* says that He guided them, but they chose blindness over guidance (*Fussilat*: 17).

How could it be that God guided them, and then, they preferred blindness to guidance? The expression 'He guided them' here means that He pointed to them the way of goodness; and in doing so, He left them the power to decide between alternatives, so, they had the ability to choose this or that.

And when God guided them and directed them, they preferred blindness to guidance. God speaks to His Messenger in two other places in the Noble Quran about this. In the first, He tells him that indeed he cannot guide aright everyone whom he loves (*al-Qasas*: 56), thus negating that He *peace and blessings be upon him* guides; yet, in the second verse, the True Lord affirms that the Messenger does guide where He says that he assuredly guides to the straight way (*ash-Shura*: 52).

How could it be that God affirms a single action for a single person and then negate the very same action for the very same person? We say to this: The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* is obliged to direct people to the Way of God; but he is not obliged to force them to follow the Way of God because this is not his job. When God said that he cannot guide whom he loves, this means: You cannot force and compel those whom you love, but rather, he assuredly guides by giving direction only; it is for you to deliver the message, and for Us to deliver the Reckoning.

So, the words of the True Lord ‘Not upon you is [responsibility for] their guidance, but God guides whom He wills....’ do not constitute evidence for the compelled faith by which some of these morally dissolute people want to justify their psychological separation from God’s way. We say to such people: There is a difference between the guidance of direction and the guidance of assistance; God guides both the believer and the disbeliever in that He points to them the right way, but He guides those who have faith in Him with the guidance of assistance, the guidance of providential support, and the guidance of making acts of obedience to Him seem easier to perform.

God says, ‘Not upon you is [responsibility for] their guidance, but God guides whom He wills. And whatever good you [O believers] spend is for yourselves....’ This is a way of dealing with stinginess logically; everything a person gives will bring benefit to him; the only one who gives and receives no benefit by giving, is God: He Alone does not benefit from what He gives to His creatures, since He *the Exalted* has possessed all the Attributes of Perfection from pre-eternity, from before He created all creation. What a person gives brings him benefit, and what our Lord gives brings benefit to us all.

This is why one of the early Muslims who possessed the insight of faith said, 'I have never done any good for anyone.' They said to him, 'Do you say this, when you did such-and-such for so-and-so, and such-and-such for so-and-so, and such-and-such for so-and-so?' He said, 'I only did it for myself.' It is as though he saw, when he did things for others, that he was really doing it for himself. We said before, that Al-Hasan AL-Basri – who had insightful knowledge of God – used, when someone would come begging from him, to smile and greet them warmly, saying: 'Welcome to him who comes to carry my supplies to the Hereafter free of charge!'

So, he considered that they were giving to him even as they took from him. The True Lord *the Most High* discusses this matter by saying, '...And whatever good you [O believers] spend is for yourselves...', that is, beware of thinking that I ask you to give to others; I have asked you to spend in order that I shall increase you in spending and giving. Then He says, '...And whatever you spend of good – it will be fully repaid to you....' The word *yuwaffa* used in the verse means to repay in full. Do not think that you are spending on one who might be ungrateful for the good you have done; for whatever good you spend, God knows of it. So spend upon those who are ungrateful, not those who praise you in return; because by doing this, you take your reward from the one who praises you, and you will have no reward with God.

I always used to say to those who complain of people being ungrateful for favours and forgetting acts of kindness: You deserve this because you had them on your minds when you spent on them; if you had kept God in mind, this would never have happened. Then God says, '...And whatever good you [O believers] spend is for yourselves, and you do not spend except seeking the Face of God....' Is this verse meant to praise the deeds of the believers, or it is a command in the form of a statement?

It is both at the same time and it means, 'Spend seeking the Face of God,' '...And whatever good you [O believers] spend is for yourselves, and you do not spend except seeking the Face of God. And whatever you spend of good – it will be fully repaid to you, and you will not be wronged.' You shall not be wronged by creatures, nor shall you be wronged by the Creator; as for the creatures, you will have exonerated your religion and your honour by giving

up God's rights from your wealth, so, no one will be able to say anything offensive about you; and as for God, He *the Exalted* will repay what you have spent in goodness many times over.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* speaks about one of the ways of spending on others which was in the early days of Islam:

لِلْفُقَرَاءِ الَّذِينَ أَحْصَرُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ لَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ ضَرْبًا فِي
الْأَرْضِ يَحْسَبُهُمُ الْجَاهِلُ أَغْنِيَاءَ مِنَ التَّعَفُّفِ تَعْرِفُهُمْ بِسِيمَاهُمْ لَا
يَسْأَلُونَ النَّاسَ إِلْحَافًا وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِهِ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٧٣﴾

**[Give] to those needy who are wholly occupied in God's way
and cannot travel in the land [for trade]. The unknowing
might think them rich because of their self- restraint, but you
will recognize them by their characteristic of not begging
persistently. God is well aware of any good you give [273]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 273)**

When we hear a noble verse beginning with a preposition and its object, we know that something must be linked to this. So what does the phrase 'for the poor' stand for? Here, it stands for charity, i.e. spending upon the needy who are wholly restricted in the way of God. If we ask what 'restricted' (*'uhsiru*) means, we find that in Arabic we have the words *hasar* and *ahsar*, both of which imply preventing or hindering, except that sometimes hindering comes in a form which you are unable to deal with, whilst at other times, it comes in a form you are able to deal with.

If someone is ill, for example, and is therefore held back from travelling about the land, does he have the ability to do so? No; but if someone wants to travel about the land, but a human being like him stops him from doing so, he is thereby prevented. So in both cases, there is hindering, and it might be within the person himself, or it might be the result of the action of someone else. They were 'restricted in the Way of God' and held back because the disbelievers restricted the means of living for them; or they wrapped themselves up in struggling in God's cause and did not want to occupy themselves with anything else because Islam was still in need of people to struggle. These

were the 'People of the Ledge', '...the poor who have been restricted in the Way of God, unable to move about in the land [in search of livelihood]....' And their inability to do so, stemmed from something which was out of their control, or else from something which they intended, namely to be prepared for struggling in God's Way; both explanations are possible.

The Helpers (Medinan Muslims/Al-ansar) would bring dates and leave them on their stalks, and hang them on ropes suspended from the pillars of the mosque, and whenever one of the People of the Ledge was hungry, he would take his staff and strike the date stalk so that some dates would fall down for him to eat. Some people would bring poor quality dates and put them there, and this is what God referred to when He said, '...And do not seek the defective therefrom to spend [from that in charity] while you would not take it [yourself] except with closed eyes...' (*al-Baqara*: 267).

If we consider the words of the True Lord '...unable to move about in the land [in search of livelihood]...' we notice that the word in the verse that means 'move about' is *darb*, which ordinarily means 'to strike something firmly'; so what does it mean to '(*darb*) about in the land?' The True Lord wants to make it clear to us that struggling in life must be done with one's utmost strength; and when you go about the earth, you must strike it with the plough, and strike it with the seeds; do not do things half-heartedly and feebly. For this reason, the True Lord says that He it is Who has made the earth easy to live upon; and He instructs us to go about, then, in all its regions, and eat of the sustenance which He provides; but to always bear in mind that to Him we shall be resurrected (*al-Mulk*: 15).

The earth has been subjugated by the True Lord *the Most High* for man so that he can travel upon it and consume the provision God gives him from it. About those who, being restricted in the Way of God, are unable to move about in the land, God *the Most High* says that '...An ignorant [person] would think them self-sufficient because of their restraint and modesty....' This means that the one who is ignorant of their state might imagine them to be rich, and the reason he might think this is that they refrain from begging; and since this means that they abstain from begging, God then says, '...you will know them by their [characteristic] mark: They do not ask people with importunity [or at all]....' A characteristic mark is a distinguishing sign that shows the state of the one

marked by it. It is as though you will find them to be humble, meek, and of lowly appearance even if they do not beg or ask for anything, but you will know from their condition that they deserve to be spent upon. They abstain from begging; and God then says, ‘...They do not ask people with importunity [or at all]...’ It is as though He allowed begging, but did not allow begging accompanied by harassment and importunity; if they simply asked without any harassment and importunity, would this not be a sign that they were not wealthy? Yes; but He said, ‘...An ignorant [person] would think them self-sufficient because of their restraint and modesty....’ So, there is no begging – no begging at all; so, there is the more reason that there is no importunity in begging, which is proved by the fact that God says, ‘...you will know them by their [characteristic] mark....’ If they begged, we would recognise them by their begging. The verse shows us that the thing which is negated here is begging in itself. As for the word ‘importunity,’ it is used here to give a particular meaning which is intended by the inimitable rhetorical style of the Quran. What is it?

A ‘characteristic mark’ (*sima*), as we said, is a distinguishing sign that shows the state of the one marked by it, so, it is as though you will find them to be humble, meek, and of lowly appearance even if they do not beg. That is, you will recognise them from their poor condition.

If the person were to actually beg after all this, his begging would be considered importune because his state alone should be enough to indicate his need; and as long as his state indicates his need, it is most likely that he will find someone who will alleviate him of the need to beg; so, if he merely asks, it will be as though he has been persistent and importune in his request.

Furthermore, the True Lord wants the believer to have a penetrating insight with respect to his brother so that he can determine his state just by looking at him and thereby save him the need to beg; for if you recognise the ‘characteristic mark,’ you must be insightful and discerning, but if you do not recognise the ‘characteristic mark’ and wait for him to speak to you and ask of you, you suffer from a deficiency of perception. He *the Exalted* wants the believer to be perceptive so that he can discern from the look of his fellow believers and see which of them displays the anxiety of need and which of them shows the concerns of want; and if he recognises this, he will have the insightful perception of faith.

We can learn from a true story of relevance to our topic: Someone knocked on the door of a God-loving man; he answered then, went back inside and brought out something and gave it to him; then, he went back in, weeping. His wife asked him, 'Why do you weep?' He said, 'So-and-so knocked on my door.' She said, 'And you gave him something, so, why do you weep?' He replied, 'Because I left him until he had to ask of me.'

This Knower of God wept because he felt the responsibility of what he should have known by his insight, and that he should have been aware of the affairs of his brethren. This is why God ordained the gatherings on Friday so that a person can be aware of the absence of any of his brethren – 'Why did he not come? Is he ill? Has something bad befallen him?' – and in order that he does not have to leave them until they humiliate themselves and ask of him; and when he does this, he possesses the insightful perception of faith.

'...And whatever you spend of good – indeed, God is Knowing of it....' You must know that before you gave, God knew that you would give, and He has the whole matter recorded in a balance, and all of the actions of His creatures are in accordance with His predestination, and what He destined in pre-eternity will inevitably come to pass; and He *the Exalted* destined it because He knew that His servant would do it, and indeed he did. Every action has a time in which to occur and a form in which to occur, and the time is either by night, or by day.

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says by way of clarifying the different forms of spending and the times in which they occur:

الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ بِالْأَيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ سِرًّا وَعَلَانِيَةً فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ



Those who give, out of their own possessions, by night and by day, in private and in public, will have their reward with their Lord: no fear for them, nor will they grieve [274]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 274)

The act of spending will necessarily take one of two forms: either in private or in public; and the time will be either by night or by day. God confined the

time and state to two things. With respect to time, it is night or day; so, do not hold back something which you want to give and say, 'I will give it by day or by night because this is better,' thereby giving yourself an excuse for tardiness in giving it. The True Lord wants you to spend on the needy person whether by night or by day. With respect to mode, it is either private, or public. The question of whether the time is night or day, or of whether the mode is private, or public, has nothing to do with the sincerity of intention in the act of giving.

God says, 'Those who spend their wealth [in charity] by night and by day, in private and in public – they will have their reward with their Lord....' Did the verse say 'Those who spend their possessions by night, or by day'? No; we are all asked to make our spending both by night and by day, and it said 'in private and in public'; so, spend by night, and spend by day, and spend in private, and spend in public; do not limit spending to night, or to day, nor to any particular time, mode, or state.

The True Lord *the Most High* broadened the time of spending to encompass both night and day, and also broadened the mode of spending to include both private and public, in order that spending will take place at all times and in all forms; and here, the True Lord *the Most High* says that those who do so '...will have their reward with their Lord....' These words refer to all of those who spend, whether by night or by day, and whether privately or publicly.

Nevertheless, some scholars say that these words were revealed concerning a specific event, which was that Imam Ali *God be pleased with him* had four dirhams, and he gave one of them in charity by day, another by night, another in private, and another in public, and this verse was revealed about this act; though the words 'will have their' refer to the general meaning, not the particular cause; it is as though the reward which God *the Most High* associates with this act applies universally to all who do it.

When God says, '...they will have their reward with their Lord...', we find the word 'reward' (*qjr*) here gives us an image of the position of the believer regarding all acts of spending, since a reward is only given for a deed: a thing has its price, and a deed has its reward. When you give someone a reward, this means they have made some effort for you, and this effort might have produced something of value. God's words '...they will have their reward with their

Lord...' indicate that the believer must consider everything which he gains from his work as something which God wants him to spend from.

God does not give him the price of what he spends, but rather, God gives him the reward for his deed. Why? Because the believer who goes about the earth, plans with his mind, and the mind was created by God, and he implements the plan which he makes with his mind by means of his energy and his limbs, which were also created by God; and he acts with the material on which he works, which was also all created by God. So what part of all this belongs to the person? Not the mind with which he plans, neither the energy with which he acts, nor the material upon which he works, for they all belong to God. So you only have the reward for your work because you use a mind which was created by God, with energy created by God, on materials created by God; and if anything is produced from all this which God wants to take from you and give to your needy, incapacitated brother, He will give you the reward of your work, not the price of your work. Yet, if the one who is equal to you in creation, namely your fellow man, takes from you the fruit of your labour, he gives you the price of that which he takes from you. So from the equal creature, it is a 'price', and from *the Most High* Creator it is a 'reward' because you do not own any part of all this.

After this, He says, '...And no fear will there be on them, nor will they grieve.' Fear means the apprehension of something which may come; so, who fears here? And what is feared? And what is feared for? And from whom do they need not have fear?

It might be that '...no fear will there be on them...' means fear of their own selves, for a student might fear for himself that he will fail, in which case it is the same person that fears and is also feared for; it is fearful now, and feared for later. When the student fears that he will fail, it is not said that the one who fears is the same as the thing which is feared because they are each in a different state.

Or alternatively, '...no fear will there be on them...' might mean fear of someone else because many rich people may be surrounded by fools who, when they see these rich people sharing their wealth generously with others, encourage them to hold back out of fear that they will become poor, perhaps

by saying to them, 'Prepare for the future because your children will live on after you.' But good people do not listen to such fools. So, '...no fear will there be on them...' either from themselves or from the fools around them; and the True Lord continues: '...nor will they grieve....' That is, they need have no fear now, nor shall they grieve when they come face to face with the realities of the goodness which God *the Most High* held in store for them; rather, they will rejoice.

After this, the True Lord speaks about one of the most critical issues of our times, which the Quran needed to deal with since it speaks about spending and charity, and there is no doubt that this necessitates one who spends, and one who is spent upon because he is incapable of working. Suppose that the people are all stingy and they do not spend; what will this incapable person do if he finds nothing? His position will be one of two things: he will go and take a loan, and if he finds no one to lend him anything, he will take an interest-bearing loan; otherwise, how will he live?

So, the verses which we are currently examining deal with the economic structure of a generous Islamic community, or a miserly Islamic community. Why? Because the One Who created man made a precise account for man so that if you calculate what those who are well-off are obliged to pay for the poor-due, and you calculate the needs of all those who are naturally unable to work, you will find that the incapable people need exactly what the capable people are obliged to give, no more, no less. If not, there would be a mistake – God forbid – in the reckoning of the Creator, and this could never be the case.

When we look at the makeup of societies, we find that a rich person may feel that he can no longer remain in a particular place, and so he moves to a new place, and the people are amazed, wondering why he left the place when he had ease, comfort and wealth. Were he poor, we would say that he went to seek wealth; but why did he leave this place when he already had wealth, and he had such an easy life? They do not realise that when God created the creation, He managed His universe by subjugating and directing the thoughts which occur to people's minds; you find that he felt he could no longer remain in his place, and his soul was filled with worry, so he decided to go somewhere else.

If we had a precise instrument of calculation, and we counted the needy people in the area from which this person moved, we would find that there

was an amount of wealth which was extraneous to the needs of those who lived in this area; therefore, God directed him to another place which required precisely this amount. In this way, we find that the exchange is controlled. So if you see a needy person, or a person who wants to deal in usury, know that there is a deficiency in the implementation of God's specified and clear rights (the rights of the needy that God prescribed as *zakat* in the money of the wealthy) – and I do not say God's unspecified rights (charity beyond the prescribed *zakat*) – that is, the wealthy person has selfishly withheld that which he is obliged to spend on the needy.

When the Quran addresses this issue, it addresses it in a way which shows the ugliness of usurious transactions in a way that makes the well-formed human soul repulsed by it. He *the Exalted* says:

الَّذِينَ يَأْكُلُونَ الرِّبَا لَا يَقُومُونَ إِلَّا كَمَا يَقُومُ الَّذِي يَتَخَبَّطُهُ الشَّيْطَانُ
مِنَ الْمَسِّ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَالُوا إِنَّمَا الْبَيْعُ مِثْلُ الرِّبَا وَأَحَلَّ اللَّهُ الْبَيْعَ وَحَرَّمَ
الرِّبَا فَمَن جَاءَهُ مَوْعِظَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِ فَانْتَهَىٰ فَلَهُ مَا سَلَفَ وَأَمْرُهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَمَنْ
عَادَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿٢٧٥﴾

But those who take usury will rise up on the Day of Resurrection like someone tormented by Satan's touch. That is because they say, 'Trade and usury are the same,' but God has allowed trade and forbidden usury. Whoever, on receiving God's warning, stops taking usury may keep his past gains – God will be his judge – but whoever goes back to usury will be an inhabitant of the Fire, there to remain [275] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 275)

Look at the word 'consume.' Are all the needs of life about eating? No; the needs of life are many, and eating is just one of them, but it is the most important of them because it is the means of preserving life. 'Usury' means that which is extraneous, and as long as it is extraneous, this means that it does not need to be consumed, so, this is a way of censuring it. The True Lord wants to show the ugliness of this matter, so, He says that such people have a characteristic mark; the scholars speculate as to whether this mark is something in the Hereafter

which marks them out at the Resurrection, as the True Lord says that all who were lost in sin shall by their marks be known (*ar-Rahman*: 41).

Those who did not pray will have a special mark, and those who did not pay the poor-due will have a different special mark so that when you see them, you will know them by their marks, and know which type of sinners they are. It is as though when they arise on the Day of Resurrection, they will arise in a demented state like the one whom Satan confounds with his touch and thereby makes him demented or, alternatively, it might be that this will happen to them even in this world. Let us look into this matter: ‘Those who consume usury cannot stand [on the Day of Resurrection] except as one stands who is being confounded and touched by Satan into insanity....’ We want to know about the words ‘confounded,’ ‘Satan,’ and ‘touch.’ To be confounded (*takhabbut*) means to walk unsteadily and erratically, and you say ‘So-and-so is confounded’ when his movements are not coherent, and not logical, but rather are movements without any order; this is to be confounded. ‘Satan’ is a species of God’s creation, because God told us that He created man and jinn kind; some of the jinn are devils, whilst others are just jinn, and Satan is the sinner of the jinn. We have not seen Satan, but we know of him because the True Lord, in whom we believe, has told us of him saying: I have hidden creatures, which is why I called them ‘jinn’ – since the word *jann* means ‘concealed,’ and the word *majnoon* (‘insane’) means someone whose mind is covered – and the sinner from amongst these creatures is named Satan.

So, our belief in him is not based on sensation, but rather, on our faith in the unseen things of which He in whom we believe has told us. When we speak about something called ‘belief,’ we must be aware that it is concerned with things which cannot be tangibly sensed; for you are not asked to ‘believe’ in tangible things since you can see them for yourself. I do not say, ‘I believe that the light is turned on now,’ and I do not ‘believe’ that we are all gathered in the mosque now; I do not say this because it is something we can tangibly sense and witness. So matters of belief are connected to the Unseen such as belief in the existence of angels. Since we believe in the Unseen, we find that the True Lord *the Most High* gives us an image of Satan, but when He gives us an image of Satan or of Satan’s head which identifies him just as our heads identify us, He *the Exalted* speaks of

the tree of '*Zaqqum*,' saying that it is a tree that grows in the very heart of the blazing fire of hell; its fruit looks like satans' heads (*as-Saffat*: 64-65).

The tree of *Zaqqum* is in the Hereafter in Hell, so, we cannot see it, and we cannot see the heads of the devils; then why would God compare what we have not seen to something else we have not seen, comparing something unknown to something else unknown? We say: Yes, and this is an intentional aspect of the inimitable nature of the Quran; the image of Satan is ugly when imagined, which is borne out by the fact that if you asked the world's cartoonists to draw a picture of Satan, without giving them any particular guidelines, they would all draw the ugliest image they could imagine, each one depicting him from a certain perspective of ugliness so that if you collected all the pictures, no two of them would be alike. Each artist would make the picture he drew ugly; and when we give the prize for the best depiction of Satan, will we give it to the most beautiful picture, or the ugliest? We will give the prize to whoever drew the ugliest picture. So the representative image of Satan is a vile and ugly image; and if there were only a single image of this ugliness, perhaps people might differ about it; perhaps it would be ugly for you, but not ugly for someone else. But when God frees people's imaginations to envisage this ugliness, it will be subjective and clear for every person, which will make the image more perfect and complete; the way to perfection and completion is for the archetype of ugliness to be present in every image.

The True Lord says '...who is being confounded and touched by Satan into insanity....' We said that Satan is the sinful jinn, and we said that our Lord *the Most High* told us many times that devils have connections and links with many human beings and that certain kinds of humans would seek refuge with certain kinds of jinn: but these only increased their confusion (*al-Jinn*: 6).

They '...cannot stand [on the Day of Resurrection] except as one stands who is being confounded and touched by Satan into insanity....' It is as though Satan has touched the human constitution in such a way as to disrupt the balance of his dispositions; for the dispositions of human constitution are balanced with one another, and each motion they make has its balance, and if Satan touches him, the equilibrium of his dispositions is disturbed; the psychological dispositions are unbalanced and inharmonious with one another, so, his actions are disorderly and illogical. What does this image have to do

with usurious transactions? If we consider that it is a mark in the Hereafter, it means that if you see someone confounded in the Hereafter, it means that he was one of those who dealt in usury; and in this world too, you find that his actions are illogical and hysterical. How so?

Look at the world today. God created the world in a state of integration; one person enjoys certain abilities and talents, whilst another person has abilities and talents of another kind so that the one who has these abilities, requires the one who has those abilities, and existence is therefore perfected. If every person was simply a repeated unit, everyone would be independent of everyone else; and if everyone had equal talents, people would not need one other. But talents are different because if you are good at one of life's arts, another person will be good at another art which you require; and if they need you for what you excel in, you need them for what they excel in; and in this way, the world is integrated. Likewise, God created the world with hot areas, and cold areas, and mineral-bearing areas, and arable areas so that the world would have to integrate, and everyone in the world would have to live with one another; for this reason, the True Lord says in the chapter of *ar-Rahman* that He had spread out the earth for all human beings (*ar-Rahman*: 10).

He spread it out – for whom? And the earth – which earth? And which human beings? 'The earth' means all the planet earth, and 'human beings' means all human beings; so, if it is restricted by barriers, it will be spoiled. Preventing man from moving from one place to another spoils man's motions in the world; a person might want to move to a virgin land to thrive thereupon, but the inhabitants of this land refuse this; yet, if the earth, all the earth, was for human beings, all human beings, if there was no work to be found in one place, you could go somewhere else without any restrictions – these restrictions which have come from temporal powers which seek to claim places for themselves; and this is what spoils the world. There are areas which suffer from food shortages, and areas which suffer from labour shortages so that good arable land is not worked; if all of the earth was for all human creatures, there would be no deficits.

We notice what they speak of 'overpopulation' or 'population explosions,' whilst there are other places which are in need of inhabitants, and there are people in need of places to live comfortably. So why does this lack of equilibrium occur? This lack of equilibrium is the result of the fact that human behaviour is

illogical in this universe. The universe in which we live has seen all kinds of intellectual advances, and innovative ambitions have risen to the celestial bodies and invaded outer space, and in every house, there are devices of luxury; does logic not dictate that the world should be living in happiness and comfort?

Logic dictates that the world should be living in comfort and ease because everyday it invents things which allow it to produce more with less effort and in less time; what more do we want? But is the world in which we live in logical line with this reality? No, but rather, we find that even in the wealthiest and most economically powerful nation in the world, the people suffer from anxiety, and it is filled with conflict, and perversion is widespread throughout it, and it suffers from a high level of mental illness in its population.

So, the world is not logical, and this confusion affirms what the True Lord says, '...except as one stands who is being confounded and touched by Satan into insanity....' This hysterical activity in the world shows that the world is not comfortable, and not in harmony with its ambitions and innovations.

Should it not have been incumbent on the world, considering its intellectual advances, to search for the reason for this, and to know why we undergo all this suffering when we have these innovative ambitions? They should indeed have searched; for the affliction is general, and it does not affect underdeveloped and developing nations alone, but rather, it is also present in developed nations. Intellectuals should have held conferences to look into this concern; and since the problem is universal and affects all nations, both developed and developing, we must look for a shared cause, not look for a cause which might be true of some people but not of others. If we had searched, we would have said: It exists in this environment, and also exists in all other environments, so, there must be a common factor.

The kinds of provision which exists in this universe are two: there is provision which is directly benefitted from, and provision which is the means of attaining that which is directly benefitted from. I eat a slice of bread, and this is direct provision; and I drink a cup of water, and this is direct provision; and I wear clothes, and this is also direct provision; and I live in a house, and this fourth thing is also direct provision; and I turn on the light, and this is direct provision. But money brings direct provision, and cannot serve in the

stead of direct provision. If I have a mountain of gold and I am hungry, what good is it to me? So, bread is better than it. This is direct provision; with money or gold I can buy this and that, but it cannot replace them for me.

A time has come when people think that money is everything so that it has become a goal, and people have become attached to it. Yet, the truth is that money is not a goal, and it is no good making it into a goal; rather, it is a means. If its nature as a means is lost, and it becomes a goal, it will inevitably corrupt the world; the cause of the entire world's corruption, with respect to the common factor, is money now that it has become a goal instead of a means.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to purify people's economic life in a way which conserves the majority of that which they eat, drink and wear so that their actions will issue from cells which are faithful, pure and clean; since that which issues forth from a cell which is faithful, pure, and clean, can only lead to that which is good.

It is amazing that we find that the people who invented the usurious banking system for us now are trying their utmost to be rid of it – not because they see that getting rid of it, will be a religious purification, but because they see that all of life's evils are the result of this usury. This cry is not something new occurring for the first time in our current times, but is rather old: in 1950, the global economist Schacht, having seen the imbalance of the system in his native country Germany and throughout the world, made a report saying that all of this corruption, was caused by the usurious banking system, and that this system assured that the rich would get richer; and as long as this system assured that the rich would get richer, from where would their extra riches come? Without doubt, they would become richer to the detriment of the poor. So this would lead to a situation where all wealth would end up in the hands of a minority in the world, which would determine everything about the world's future, especially its moral future. Why? Because the ones who love to invest money, consider nothing but financial benefit, and then, manage projects which will achieve financial gains for them. Another economist named Keynes, a leader of the 'free-market' theory of world economics, made his famous statement that wealth will not perform its function in life unless interest rates are lowered to zero which would mean that there would be no usury.

If we look at the procedure of a usurious contract in itself, we find that it is a false contract; for every contract is only made in order to protect the two contracting parties, and usurious contracts only protect the lending party. There is also another moral issue, which is that a person can only give usury if he possesses wealth which is extraneous to his needs.

Yet, a person only takes an interest-bearing loan if he is in need, so, look at the moral degeneracy of the world: the poor needy person who does not have enough to satiate his hunger and his need, is forced to take a loan, and yet, this poor needy person must then repay the principal and more besides to the one who is rich and free of need.

This is a moral degeneracy which will create resentment in society, and create bitterness in society, and it will spell the end of kindness and devalue it among people, and compassion in society will disappear. Whenever a poor person sees a rich person who has wealth, and the rich person stipulates to the poor needy person that he must repay what he takes from him and more besides, what will this do to the feelings and emotions of the poor person? It would have been enough for the rich person to give to the poor person and then, to take back later, what he gave him; but the usurious rich person wants the poor person to repay what he took and more besides. Some people are used to making excuses and say: The Quranic text only talks about usury which demands repayments which are doubled and redoubled, so, if we limit it so that it does not reach the level of redoubling, it will not be unlawful!

That is, they wanted to justify giving a poor person money and then, making him pay back only double, not many doubles so that this level of repayment would not be unlawful. To these people, we say: Those who say this are trying to manipulate the Quranic text, as though God would leave the text in such a way that they could manipulate it and steal from it what they want without placing anything in the text which prevents such manipulation. They should have noticed that God says, at the end of the matter, that if usurious lenders repent, then, they will be entitled to the return of their principal; they will do no wrong, and neither will they be wronged (*al-Baqara*: 279). This decisive statement clarifies that God did not make exception for either a single doubling, or many. So when God commands the believers not to consume

usury, doubling and re-doubling it – but to fear God so that they might attain success (*Al-Imran*: 130), these wise words only came to show the reality of the situation in which they were living, and God did not make exception for either single doubling, or any redoubling; for the True Lord made the starting-point of repentance: that a person takes back his principal only; God does not allow anyone to take an additional half, or double, or two doubles; He does not allow any doubling, or redoubling.

Similar people with usurious state of mind and intentions, also used to make the excuse that if two parties are both in agreement on anything this constitutes an agreement and a contract. This might well have been the case were it not for the fact that there is a Lawgiver higher than all men who has authority over this agreement and the right to control it – every time two parties agree on something, does it automatically become lawful?

If this were the case, fornication would be lawful because both parties agree on it. This matter – the agreement of both parties – only applies to those things for which there is no specific legislation from *the Most High* Lawgiver, namely God, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of All existence.

God has stipulated something which abrogates any agreement that might exist between you and me; for He has ultimate authority, and He is the One Who has passed judgement on the matter; and there can be no valid agreement between us about something which contravenes what God has legislated or what He has decreed. If we look at this matter in another way, we find that the agreement which they claim exists is to be rejected; it is a false ‘agreement’ when subjected to careful scrutiny and logical examination. Why? Because we say that an agreement between two people is only fair if what they have agreed upon does not affect anyone else; if what they agree on affects someone else besides them, it is a false agreement.

Suppose that a person has nothing, and another person has a thousand; the one who has a thousand possesses it, and puts it to work in some way; and when the one who owns the thousand does this work, he requires the payment for his work in order to live from this payment. As for the one who has nothing, who if he wants to do the same thing the one who owned a thousand did, he goes to someone and takes a thousand from him in order to put it to work as the

owner of the thousand did; and the one who gives him this thousand stipulates that he must pay an extra hundred when he pays it back, then in this case, the one who borrowed the thousand not only requires a return for his labour like the owner of the thousand did, but also requires the extra hundred which the one who gave him the interest-bearing loan requires. Where will the one who borrowed the thousand get this hundred from? Even if his wares are the same value as the wares of the other man, he will lose out; and if his wares are of a lower value than those of the other, they will sell badly and fail.

So, he will have no option but to utilise a deceitful ruse, which is to make his wares superficially seem to resemble those of the other, whilst reducing the active elements of the production of his wares, taking from them that which is equal to the extra one hundred he has to pay to the creditor as usury. So who will pay for this? The consumer will. So, the consumer is harmed by this agreement and he is the one who will suffer because he will end up paying the value of the merchant's loan through his wares, as well as the value of the usurious amount which the creditor stipulated. So the usurious contract between the debtor and the creditor – even according to their understanding – is an invalid contract despite the fact that they – the debtor and the creditor – both agree on it.

the True Lord *the Most High* wants mercy and compassion to spread amongst people, and mutual affection to spread amongst people. The True Lord, the Owner of all blessings wanted to spread through the people the concept that everyone who is granted favours in this world, must share these favours with others; and when the needy person sees these favours, he will know that he will benefit from them, and since he will benefit from them, he will not look at them with bitterness, nor with envy, nor will he hope for them to end because he will get something out of them.

But if the general practice is that the possessor of favours in this world wants to take advantage of everyone who benefits from his favours, and does not look after the right of God in the purpose of these favours, and does not share these favours with others, and when the needy person sees this, he will hope for these favours to go away from their possessor, and he will look at them with envy, and so bitterness will spread along with resentment, and corruption will find the perfect opportunity to spread through the whole of society.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants three elements to regulate the economy: The first element is support and pure giving so that the poor needy person finds a rich person to give to him; not in the form of the True Lord's law of the known poor-due (prescribed *zakat*), but in the form of the True Lord's law of (unlimited) charity; and this is support. The second element is the right to that which is obligatory, namely the prescribed poor-due or *zakat*. The third element is the right to borrow, which is debt.

So, there are three things which govern Islamic economics: either voluntary charity, or paying the obligatory poor-due, or giving a goodly loan; this is what the Islamic economic system is built upon. Let us consider the words of the True Lord *the Most High* when He presents this matter and shows the ugliness of the state of those who consume usury by saying that they do not stand except as one might stand whom Satan has confounded and befuddled with his touch. Why? Because, as the True Lord says of them, '...“Trade is [just] like usury.”' What is being discussed here – usury, or trade? It is usury which is being discussed here. It might have been more logical to say, 'Usury is just like trading'; so what made them turn things around? The Quranic text here alludes to how they are confounded even when it comes to the thing which they want to argue for. It is as though they said, 'As long as you want to forbid usury, trading is like usury, so, you must also forbid trade. 'The context should have made them say, 'Usury is like trading,' but the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to show us how they were confounded, so, He placed into their mouths the words 'Trading is just like usury, so if you have forbidden usury then forbid trading; and if you have allowed trading then allow usury.' They want them either to stay both or be eliminated both.

So, giving the decisive verdict, God said, '...But God has permitted trade and has forbidden usury. So whoever has received an admonition from his Lord and desists....' Ibn Mas'ud *God be pleased with him* is narrated to have said, 'The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* cursed the one who consumes usury and the one who gives it.'⁽¹⁾

(1) Narrated by Muslim; the narrations of At-Tirmidhi and others add: 'And its two witnesses and the one who records it in writing'

An admonition from God has come; and if an admonition comes from someone who does not stand to benefit from it, it is logical that it be accepted; on the other hand, the admonition that is doubtful is the one in which he who gives it, stands to get some benefit from it. If the admonition comes from someone who does not stand to benefit from this admonition, this is a reason to accept it. '...So whoever has received an admonition from his Lord and desists....' Let us consider the word 'his Lord': when it comes here, it means the True Lord, Who has undertaken your sustenance and instruction, and Who takes care of sustenance through creation by bringing into being that which preserves life, and that which preserves the species, and who protects everything by subjugating everything to you, O man; so, as a human being, you must be respectful before your Lord, and not put yourself in a position where you accuse the Lord and Creator of any suspicion of benefiting from this admonition – God forbid. Why? Because the Creator is Sustainer and Educator, and since He is Lord, this means He undertakes your sustenance and instruction; so, beware, O man, of rebelling against the admonition of the Lord and Educator. '...So whoever has received an admonition from his Lord and desists may have what is past....' This means that the command was not retroactive, so, it did not apply to what had taken place before it was ordained because it was taken before the prohibition had been revealed; and this is mercy. Why? Because it might have been the case that a usurious creditor had managed his life by means of the usury he had been receiving before the prohibition was revealed; and if this was the case, the True Lord *the Most High* pardoned all that had gone before; and the usurious creditor had to begin his life afresh according to the new economic model.

This is the greatness of the Divine law: '...and desists may have what is past, and his affair rests with God....' That is, he will be allowed to keep his past gains from before usury was prohibited; and the words '...his affair rests with God....' indicate that when God *the Most High* forgives what has gone before, He has the absolute right to legislate what He wills, so, you should always attach yourself to the continuation of grace from God; '...his affair rests with God....' Such a person might say, 'I will be financially destroyed, and my position will be toppled, and I will become such-and-such.' No; place your trust in God, for God can replace any loss, and He *the Exalted* does not want to put people's positions in

jeopardy, but rather wants to say to them: If I take away any of your favours, then, place yourselves in the care of He Who gives all favours.'

As long as you have placed yourself in the care of the One Who gives all blessings, the blessing itself is nothing because the One Who gives all blessings, will replace this blessing. Usury is one of the seven deadly destructive sins that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* commanded us to avoid when he said, 'Avoid the seven deadly sins.' His Companions asked, 'O Messenger of God, what are they?' He answered, 'Associating partners with God; sorcery; killing a soul that God made inviolable, save for a just reason; consuming usury; consuming the wealth of an orphan; turning back from a military advance; and defaming unwitting chaste, believing women.'⁽¹⁾

The verse says, '...and his affair rests with God. But whoever returns to [dealing in usury]...', that is, return to it after the admonition: what will be their case? The answer is: '...those are the inmates of the Fire; they will abide eternally therein.' It would have been enough to say of them that '...those are the inmates of the Fire...;' for perhaps one of them might be a believer, and yet still return to sinful ways, and thus be required to spend time in hell. Yet, His words '...they will abide eternally therein' indicate that they have thereby left the realm of faith altogether; and in order to understand these final words, you must understand the preceding words very well; for there are two matters here: there is usury which God has forbidden, and there are people who wish to make usury lawful by saying '...“Trade is [just] like usury ...”'; if you return to usury, whilst nevertheless believing it to be forbidden, you are a sinful believer, who will enter the hellfire. Yet, if you return to your old ways of debating its unlawfulness, saying '...Trade is [just] like usury...', and you argue against the unlawfulness of usury and seek to make it lawful like trading, you are thereby leaving the religion of Islam; and by leaving the religion of Islam, you thereby condemn yourself to eternity in hell.

With this in mind, we must alert those who argue for usury, and tell them to at least say, 'Usury is unlawful, but we are unable to bring ourselves to annul it and leave it,' and tell them that they must struggle against

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

themselves to stop doing it so that they do not expose themselves to war from God and His Messenger. If they believe that usury is unlawful, they will only be sinners; yet, if they attempt to justify usury and make it lawful, they will fall into something even more evil than this, which is disbelief – and we seek refuge with God.

We know that Adam *peace be upon him* disobeyed his Lord, and ate from the tree, and Satan also disobeyed his Lord; yet, when Adam received certain words from his Lord, He turned to him in forgiveness whilst God cast Satan out. So why did He cast Satan out and make him an object of curse? It is because Adam admitted the sin, and acknowledged that they had sinned against themselves (*al-A'raf*: 23). Adam acknowledged: 'Your judgement, O Lord is the judgement of truth, but I sinned against myself.' But Satan protested and objected, wondering to his Lord whether it will be right for him to prostrate himself before one whom the Lord has created of clay (*al-Isra'*: 61). So it is as though he threw the command back at the One Who issued it.

After this, and after God made clear the ruling concerning usury, and stated that whosoever desists would be allowed to keep his past gains; what about those who return to it? '...But whoever returns to [dealing in usury]...' which is the contrast, '...those are the inmates of the Fire; they will abide eternally therein.' He *the Exalted* wants to say: Beware of allowing the word *riba* ('usury') to deceive you, for words can deceive people; for you called it *riba* which literally means 'increase' out of a superficial understanding that usury is an increase, whilst the poor-due is a decrease; usury will turn one hundred into one hundred and ten, for example, depending on the rate of interest, whilst the poor-due turns one hundred into 97.5 with respect to money and merchandise – with some difference in the case of agricultural and other concerns. On the surface, it seems that usury brings gain, whilst the poor-due brings a loss, but this decrease and this increase are only according to your definitions and your conventions. Yet, the True Lord *the Most High* deprives this increase of any blessing, whilst He causes this loss to bring growth; so He *the Exalted* says:

يَمْحَقُ اللَّهُ الرِّبَا وَيُزِيهِ الصَّدَقَاتِ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ كَفَّارٍ أَثِيمٍ ﴿٢٧٦﴾

God blights usury, but blesses charitable deeds with multiple increase. He does not love the ungrateful sinner [276] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 276)

The word *yamhaq* (rendered here as ‘destroys’) comes from the word *mahq* which means to be wasted gradually; that is, not to be destroyed in one strike, but rather to be lost gradually without being noticed; from this root is derived the word *mihaq* which means the waning of the moon. ‘...God destroys usury...’ thus means that He makes it seemly to its possessor, and then, ruin gradually comes to him without him noticing it.

If we perhaps carefully scrutinise the environments around us, we will find the corroboration of this. How many people have dealt in usury, and we have seen them and known them, and after this we saw how their lives ended up. ‘God destroys usury and gives increase for charities...’ In another verse, God says that whatever you may give out in usury so that it might increase through people’s money will bring no increase in the sight of God (*ar-Rum*: 39).

So, beware of thinking that you are deceiving God by doing this; and what is the contrasting side? In the same verse cited above, God states that whatever you give out in charity, seeking God’s Face, it is they, they that shall have their recompense multiplied (*ar-Rum*: 39). They are those who thereby make the thing multiply many times over.

When the True Lord says, ‘God destroys usury...’, do not underestimate the fact that the action is ascribed to God. When an action is ascribed to its doer, it must take its mode from the self of the doer. If you are told that so-and-so who is weak, will punch you, or that so-and-so the boxer will punch you, you will certainly judge this blow according to the one who delivers it. If God is the One Who says ‘God destroys usury...’, could there be any destruction above this? No, there could not.

Also, when God says, ‘God destroys usury and gives increase for charities...’ in the Quran – which is recited by Muslims everywhere, and which is inimitable

and preserved, and which challenges by being preserved, this is something which is absolutely guaranteed. 'God destroys usury and gives increase for charities...' because the One who said it is God, in His Preserved Book, which is recited as an act of worship; that is, the matter is on the lips of everyone, and in the hearts of all the believers. Would God say something, which would then, be preserved in this way, if a time could ever come to disprove it? No; this is not possible. A person only preserves the documents which he will rely on to help him; I only keep hold of the bill of exchange which concerns me. As long as He preserves it, and He asserts that it was He Who sent the 'Warning' and that He is its Guardian (*al-Hijr*: 9). This means that He *the Exalted* will mention certain issues in it, and these issues are what He has vowed to preserve; and He would not have vowed to preserve them unless they would be a proof of His veracity in saying them, since if something does not prove anything we do not preserve it.

For example, He *the Exalted* asserts that His soldiers will be the victorious ones (*as-Saffat*: 173). This is a matter of the Quran which God vowed to preserve, so, the reality of life must surely come to support it; for if the reality of life did not support it, what would the situation be? Would we disbelieve the Quran – and far be it for us to disbelieve the Quran – which is the speech of the True Lord, other than whom there is no deity to manage His universe besides Him?

'God destroys usury and gives increase for charities; and God does not like every sinning disbeliever.' Why did God use the intensive form *kaffar* (stubbornly disbelieving) instead of just *kafir* (disbeliever), and why did He use the intensive form *atheem* (persistent in sinful ways) instead of just *athim* (sinful)? It is because such a person wants to throw God's ruling back at Him; and in doing this, he has disbelieved twice: once in that he did not acknowledge this, and once in that he threw God's ruling back at Him. And he is a 'persistent sinner' (*atheem*) rather than just a 'sinner' (*athim*); and we can infer from this use of the intensive adjectival form that the issue which we are currently examining is a universal issue related to civilisation and society, and if it is not as God wants it to be, all the pillars of society will be shaken.

After having explained the bitterness of such a situation to us by using repeated intensive forms – *kaffar* (stubbornly disbelieving) and *atheem* (persistent in sin) – the True Lord presents to us the contrasting view so that we can taste the sweetness of the contrast. This is like the words of the poet:

The face is as white as the dawn,

And the hair is as black as night:

Two opposites which are beautiful when drawn together;

For the opposite shows the beauty of its opposite.

It is as though, after speaking about the stubborn disbeliever and the persistent sinner, God wants to bring us back to the sweetness of faith, saying:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَءَاتَوْا الزَّكَاةَ
لَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٢٧٧﴾

**Those who believe, do good deeds, keep up the prayer,
and pay the prescribed alms will have their reward with
their Lord: no fear for them, nor will they grieve [277]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 277)**

We said that the word ‘reward’ (*ajr*) implies that no created being owns any product, but rather, we are all hired workers. Why? Because we use the brain which God created, work by the energy which God created, on the material which God created; so, what do you possess, apart from your work, O man? As long as you possess nothing but your work, you will have a reward: ‘...will have their reward with their Lord....’ The expression ‘with their Lord’ here attracts our attention because when you are given a reward by your equal, he might bilk you; whilst the reward you take from your Lord Who has undertaken your sustenance, will never be lost.

The True Lord then says, ‘...and there will be no fear on them...,’ no fear from themselves for themselves, nor any fear of their loved ones for them; ‘...nor will they grieve’ because if any good had passed them by, they will find it there in front of them. After this, the True Lord says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَذَرُوا مَا بَقِيَ مِنَ
الرِّبَا إِن كُنْتُمْ مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢٧٨﴾

**You who believe, beware of God, give up any
outstanding dues from usury, if you are true
believers [278] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 278)**

When the True Lord says, ‘O you who have believed...,’ we know that the call to the faithful indicates that a command of moral responsibility will follow. When the True Lord calls with the words ‘O you who have believed...,’ this means: O you who believe in Me as a Wise, All-Powerful God Who is free of need of you and has control of everything; your disobedience does not harm Me, and your obedience does not benefit Me; so, if you believe in Me, and I am a Wise, All-Powerful God, listen to Me as I give you the rulings I have chosen for you.

So every call of ‘O you who have believed...’ in the Quran, lays the ground for every ruling which comes after it; you do as God commands you, and if anyone asks you, ‘Why did you do this?’, say to him, ‘I did it because I am a believer, and the One Who commanded me to do it, is the One in whose wisdom and power I believe.’ You do not enter into the labyrinth of attempting to find reasons for these rulings because you believe that God is a Wise, All-Powerful God Who sent down these responsibilities to you. Beware of entering the labyrinth of attempting to find reasons for rulings; why? Because there are some things whose reasons might elude you: will you put them off until you know the reason for them?

Did we postpone the ruling of the unlawfulness of pork until it was recently proven by analysis that it is harmful? No; if it was proven recently by analysis that it is harmful, this increases our trust in every ruling with which God has commanded us whose reason we have not yet been guided to. The True Lord says, ‘O you who have believed, fear God....’ One of the wonders of the command ‘fear God’ is that it is used for things which seem to be contradictory when actually they are related. ‘O you who have believed, fear God....’ He did not say here, ‘fear the Fire,’ as He indeed did

say in another verse, ‘fear the Fire.’ So, why would He say, ‘fear God’ and also ‘fear the Fire’? It is because the word ‘fear’ (*ittaqu*) means, ‘Place a shield (*wiqaya*) between yourself and your Lord.’

How can we place a shield between ourselves and our Lord when our faith requires us to adhere to God’s Way in order that we be always in the company of God? We say that God *the Most High* possesses Attributes of Majesty such as the All-Dominant, and the Lord of Retribution, and the All-Compeller, and the Lord of Might, and the Lord of Stern Punishment; and He asks his believing servant to place a shield between himself and the Attributes of Majesty; and the hellfire is one of the hosts of the Attributes of Majesty. When He *the Exalted* says, ‘fear God,’ this means, ‘place a shield between yourselves and the Attributes of Majesty, one of the hosts of which is the Hellfire.’ So, ‘fear God’ is akin to ‘fear the Fire,’ that is, place a shield between yourselves and the fire.

The True Lord goes on: ‘...and give up what remains [due to you] of usury, if you are believers.’ The command ‘give up’ means leave, forsake, and abandon, and seek goodness from God, as far as all outstanding gains from usury are concerned, if you are truly believers in God. It is as though God wanted to make this a complete purification, after which the believer would be reborn in a pure and clean state.

This is a command from the True Lord, saying: Leave the usury which you have not yet collected; for that which you have already collected is covered by the words ‘past gains’, whilst you must leave that which you have not yet collected. This is God’s command: ‘...fear God and give up what remains [due to you] of usury, if you are believers.’ If you say that the contracts were agreed upon before the prohibition, and the contracts therefore give you the right to take this, remember that you have not yet claimed this right, so, it is not in your hand; do not say, ‘My economic life is based on it’ because the basis of your economic life did not arise from agreeing to this usury, but rather, it arises by your collecting it – and you did not collect it. The True Lord continues:

فَإِنْ لَّمْ تَفْعَلُوا فَأْذَنُوا بِحَرْبٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ۖ وَإِنْ تُبْتِغُوا فَلَكُمْ
 رُءُوسُ أَمْوَالِكُمْ لَا تُظْلَمُونَ وَلَا تَظْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٧٩﴾

**If you do not, then be warned of war from God and His Messenger. You shall have your capital if you repent, and with- out suffering loss or causing others to suffer loss [279]
 (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 279)**

This verse presents a universal matter which many people ignore. A system came to protect one sector of people from the oppression of another sector, and this system only came after there emerged the sector of usurious profiteers who oppressed the sector of the weak and needy. Sufficient was for those weak people who were exploited by the usurious profiteers that the Quran gave them justice and brought an end to usury in such a way that it allowed those who dealt in usury, to keep what they had gained before since they had based their lives on it.

The verse warns the usurers: ‘...then be informed of a war [against you]....’ The word ‘be informed’ here (*fa’dhanu*) is derived from the root (‘-dh-n), from which are derived the words *idhn* (‘permission’) and *udhun* (‘ear’); the basis of this root is the concept of informing; for a person is not automatically assumed to be able to read, and he cannot read unless he first hears, and therefore the passing of information can only arise through hearing. When the True Lord *the Most High* spoke about the means by which a person attains knowledge, He tells us that it was He Who has brought us forth from our mothers’ wombs knowing nothing – but He has endowed us with hearing, sight and minds so that we might have cause to be grateful (*an-Nahl*: 78).

This is why when the science of physiology came to study this matter, they found that it followed the same principle that God had described for them. If someone puts their finger right up to the eye of a new-born baby, it does not so much as blink because its eyes are not yet performing their function; but if you shout next to its ear, it will react.

We have discovered that the first sensory organ of a new-born child to perform its function is the ear, which is also the organ that performs its function for a person whether he is awake or asleep. The eye closes during sleep, so, it

cannot see, yet, the ear remains alert at all times, so, it can hear because it is the organ of reception. So the root of the words *adhan*, ('call to prayer'), and *udhun*, ('ear'), revolves around the concept of hearing. God *the Most High* says that at the end of time, the earth will hear and obey the command of its Lord to split asunder, as in truth, it must (*al-Inshiqaq*: 5).

What does *adhinat* (hear and obey) mean? When you hear something from someone who is equal to you, you might obey, or you might not, but when you hear it from an All-Powerful God, you have no option but to obey. It is as though God is saying: The earth will be split asunder when it hears My command for it to split. Simply by the earth's hearing the command from the True Lord, it will do as bidden; and it is right for it to do so: it obeys (*adhinat*) the command of God, that is, it yields to it because the One Who uttered the command was God. So, all the meanings of this lexical root come from the word *udhun* ('ear') which is why God says to those who do not obey His command concerning usury, 'And if you do not, then be informed of a war [against you] from God and His Messenger....' As for the war with God, we only say of it what God said: No one can know the soldiers and forces of the Lord but He (*al-Muddaththir*: 31).

And no one can take precautions against them. As for the war with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, this is the manifest matter. It is as though God will unleash against usurious profiteers a terrible host of His forces which no one knows but Him, whilst in the war of the Messenger of God, the forces are those who believe in the Messenger, who must wage war against every manifestation of corruption in the universe in order to purify their lives from the taint of usury.

In this way, God set a limit to the modes of transactions so that wealth can be cleansed from this usury. When the True Lord said, '...you may have your principal – [thus] you do no wrong, nor are you wronged,' this means that He *the Exalted* is showing us by these words that there is no right for usurious profiteers to claim one double or two, nor any further multiples; and in this way 'you do no wrong' to those from whom you took usury in the past, by taking more from them than your principal.

But what is the meaning of 'nor are you wronged' and who is it that would wrong them? The weak person who was wronged by them before, might wrong them by taking some of their principal under the pretence that they exploited him before by taking back more than their principal. The Lawgiver wants to prevent the former wrongdoer by forbidding his wrong, and to mollify the one who was wronged by giving him his right; He *the Exalted* does not want to direct injustice so that the one who was wronged before, utilises it to wrong the one who wronged him first. Rather, by this ruling He *the Exalted* wanted to bring a complete end to this kind of injustice, and make everyone benefit equally from the advantages of the ruling.

Many of the theories which come to change the system in a society are biased against the side that was in the wrong; they do not only put an end to their injustice, but they allow the one who was wronged to exact revenge on the one who wronged him. This is the bias of society, and this is what people need to be very aware of; for God has given you justice, O you who was wronged, and prevented the one who wronged you from doing so; and now you must respect His ruling when He says that the usurious lender '...may have what is past...', and with this statement the matter is settled.

God *the Most High* renews the matter with a new and fair balance which brings you and him together on a level footing, without any injustice from you, O you who was wronged before, on the pretext that the lender has wronged you for so long. When societies live according to this system of '...you do no wrong, nor are you wronged...', they live on a basis of fairness, not directed injustice.

We criticise one sector of people for having wronged others, then we bring another sector and allow them to wrong others in their turn! No; everyone must be on an equal footing from now on.

The corruption of any system in society comes from the directing of injustice from a new sector to an old sector because in this case, the injustice continues to exist. One sector was unjust, and then, the sector which was wronged comes to do injustice to the sector which was unjust before. We say to them: this is directed injustice, and we want fairness to be institutionalised and spread to every member of society so that everyone can claim what is

rightfully his: We prevent the one who was unjust at an earlier time before the revelation of God's rulings from doing any further wrong, and we give justice to the one who was oppressed before, and in this way everyone becomes on a level footing so that society can proceed in a way that is fair, and governed by a principle of faith. We can only respond to those who disobey God in our regard by obeying God in their regard.

After this, the Quran comes to open a new door of hope for those who have been wronged, and to set a limit for those who were unjust before and who were allowed to claim their principal and forbade from taking anything more than that; so, it softened their hearts towards those people, and told them, 'It is not absolutely necessary to take your principal now, but rather, you should wait and allow the debtor some time if he is in straitened circumstances; and if you grow in maturity of faithful certainty, and you are pleased to accept God above anything else that you might lose, then forgo and give up even your principal, which God has allowed you to claim in order that you may rise in rank by means of it, and give it to those who are unable to pay.' So, the True Lord says:

وَإِنْ كَانَ ذُو عُسْرٍ فَنظِرَةٌ إِلَىٰ مَيْسَرَةٍ وَأَنْ تَصَدَّقُوا
خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ



If the debtor is in difficulty, then delay things until matters become easier for him; still, if you were to write it off as an act of charity, that would be better for you, if only you knew [280] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 280)

'If someone is in hardship....' The ruling was given to allow the creditor to claim his principal; but suppose the debtor is in straitened circumstances. There is an issue here which is raised by some of the orientalists who claim to have studied Arabic, yet have studied it in a mechanical way without acquiring the deep natural feeling for it; for language is not only about mechanics; language is also about nature, and language is about disposition, and language is about feelings. They say that the Quran breaches some of the rules of its own language, and they use this verse as an example of this: 'And if someone is in hardship, then [let there be] postponement until [a time of] ease. But if you give [from your right as] charity, then it is better for you, if you only knew.'

Some orientalists say, 'We want to ask Quran scholars about the predicate of the verb 'is' (*kana*) here in God's words 'And if someone is in hardship....' It is true that there is no predicate for the verb *kana* here, but the one who asks this does not possess an intrinsic disposition for Arabic because since he has studied Arabic, he must know that *kana* requires a subject and a predicate, and that the subject is in the nominative case, whilst the predicate is in the accusative case, and in this case, the verb *kana* is called 'defective' (*naqisa*); he should also have been aware that the verb *kana* can also come in a form known as 'complete' (*tamma*), meaning that it does not have a predicate, in which case there is only a subject in the nominative case; and this requires a simple explanation.

Every verb indicates an action and a time, and when you hear the word 'is' (*kana*), it indicates existence and a general action and does not indicate the specific condition of its subject, for example: Is he hard-working? Is he lazy? So, it indicates the general existence of something, but not its state; this means that the verb 'is' (*kana*) indicates the general time of existence, that is, the bare unfinished concept; and the purpose of something general can only be shown when it is specified: if you want to indicate the existence of something specific to clarify the meaning and show it, you must add to it a predicate; for example, by saying, 'Zaid is hard-working'; this indicates something specific, namely the hard work of Zaid. So in this case, the verb 'is' is defective because it requires a predicate to complete it and to give it a specific existence. If this is not the case, and we wish to state the existence alone, the verb 'is' (*kana*) is complete, not defective, i.e. it is enough to give its subject alone, for example by saying, 'The one who had been away came home, so, there was joy', that is, joy existed; or 'The sun came up, so, there was light.' A poet said:

It was, and the dawn therein was not white,

And it passed, and the night therein was not black.

Therefore, the expression '...And if someone is in hardship...' means 'if there exists one who is in hardship,' that is, if there is a person who is unable to pay the loan back, let the creditor grant him '...postponement until [a time of] ease..., ' that is, until things are easier for him; and in this case the principal will be a 'goodly (non-usurious) loan,' and for every moment in which the creditor is patient concerning it, God will give him a reward.

We should be aware that the reward for a goodly loan is more than the reward for charity because when you give charity, you have no further hope regarding it, and you do not think about it, and you earn your reward for this all at once; yet, when you give a loan, your heart remains attached to it, and every time the attachment to it is severe and the love of wealth rouses you yet you have patience, you thereby earn reward. This is why you must be sure to ascertain that the loan is a goodly loan, and the one who takes the loan is excused rightfully – for there is a difference between being excused rightfully and being excused wrongfully: the one who is excused rightfully, is the one who tries his utmost to repay the debt, but circumstances stand in his way and prevent him from doing so; whilst the one who is excused wrongfully has enough to repay his debt, but he delays doing so, and keeps the money and uses it – and in doing so, he is a wrongdoer.

For this reason, test yourself and you will find that for every debt which disturbs your heart, know that the debtor is able to pay it back, but he has not; and for every debt where you feel that your heart is at ease, cool and tranquil, know that the debtor is rightfully excused and is unable to pay it back; and you might be shy to pass him by out of fear that you will embarrass him, and he will feel ashamed just by seeing you. Such people as this do not remain in debt for a long time because the Messenger announced a judgement on this matter, saying: ‘Whosoever takes people’s money with the intention of paying it back, God will see that it is paid back for him; and whosoever takes people’s money intending to waste it, God will lay waste to him.’⁽¹⁾

As long as the debtor’s intention when he takes it, is to pay it back, God will make it easy for him to pay it back; and if he takes it with the intention of wasting it, God will not make it easy for him to repay it because he will not be able to leave aside any money with which his debts might be repaid. There was an incident in the life of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* which explains this Hadith for us, which is that a man died whilst in debt, and when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was told that he was in debt, he said to his Companions: ‘Pray (the funeral prayer) for your brother.’

(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Ahmad on the authority of Abu Hurayra God be pleased with him

So, he did not pray it himself, but rather, he asked his Companions to do so. Why did he not pray? Because he had said before: 'Whosoever takes people's money with the intention of paying it back, God will see that it is paid back for him.' As long as the man died without having paid it back, his intention must have been to put off repaying it; but the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* did not prevent his Companions from praying the funeral prayer for the man.

And the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* dealt with the one who is in hardship with the munificence of faith, saying, 'Whoever gives more time to one who is straitened, or forgoes his debt, God will cover them with His shade on a day when there is no shade but His.'⁽¹⁾ The meaning of 'gives more time' is to delay and put off the deadline for the collection of the debt, and not to follow it up, and not to imprison him for his debt and chase him up; and if the creditor rises even higher in his certitude of faith, he would say to him, 'Go, may God give recompense for both me and you,' and that would be the end of it. This is why the True Lord says, '...But if you give [from your right as] charity, then it is better for you, if you only knew,' and the fruit of this is the best of rewards from God. You may either delay and give more time, or else remit part, or all of the debt by way of charity, and you are free to do as you choose. Look at the precision of the treatment of the True Lord in how He put an end to this economic problem which was a major concern of the environment of the pre-Islamic times of ignorance.

From what has preceded, we know that Islam bases economic activity on munificence and giving, and the True Lord *the Most High* spoke about it in the verses of spending which began with His words: '...The example of those who spend their wealth in the Way of God is like a grain...' and He spoke at length about spending; and 'spending' includes both that which is obligatory upon you such as the *zakat* (poor-due), and that which you give voluntarily. When someone gives something voluntarily, above and beyond that which God obliges him to give, God *the Most High* considers this as the right of the needy person, but an 'unspecified' right. To have a good understanding of this matter we need to have a close look at God's statements in the following verses: God

(1) Narrated by Ahmad and Muslim on the authority of Abu Al-Yusr

states that the God-fearing will be amid gardens and springs, enjoying all that their Lord will have granted them because, assuredly, they were *muhsinin* ('doers of good/seeking perfection in worship') in the past (worldly life); they would not sleep but for a short time during the night (*adh-Dhariyat*: 15-17).

Does Islam require us to only sleep for a short time of the night? No; the Muslim has the right to offer the '*Isha* ('night') Prayer and then sleep, and then rise to offer the '*Fajr* ('dawn') Prayer, and this is what Islam requires. But here, the True Lord *the Most High* is speaking about the *muhsinin* (seekers of perfection in worship), the doers of good who have entered the status of excellence (*ihsan*) with God.

Furthermore, the God-conscious will find themselves amid gardens and springs, enjoying all that their Lord will have granted them because, assuredly, they were *muhsinin* in their worldly life; they would not sleep but for a short time during the night, and would pray for pardon in the pre-dawn hours (*adh-Dhariyat*: 15-18). Does Islam oblige the believer to rise in the late hours of the night to pray for forgiveness? No; the Muslim has only to perform the obligations; but if he wants to enter the status of *ihsan* ('excellence'), he must know that the way to this is praying for forgiveness in the late hours of the night. The discourse here concerns the status of excellence. And the True Lord adds about those who have attained this status that in their wealth is a share to the needy beggars and to the deprived (*adh-Dhariyat*: 15).

God *the Most High* assigned, from the wealth of those who have attained the status of excellence, a due share for the beggar and the deprived, but He did not specify the value or form of this due share, and whether it is something known, or unknown. But when God speaks about the general believers, He *the Exalted* describes them as those in whose possessions there is a specific due share for those who ask for help and for the deprived (*al-Ma'arij*: 24-25).

So, we see that from the wealth of the one who has attained the status of excellence, there is an unspecified share for the beggar and the deprived, but from the wealth of the ordinary believer there is a specified due share, namely the poor-due. The status of excellence is above that of general faith because the due share of the believer's wealth is known, whereas in the case of *ihsan* ('the status of excellence') part of their wealth is a due share to be given to the needy, even though it is unspecified, i.e. unlimited.

We have seen that some jurists say that since the poor-due is the right of the needy person from the wealthy person, if the wealthy person refuses to give him this right, he should be considered to be stealing from the needy person; and if the amount is equal to the minimum value considered by the legal definition of stealing, he should be subjected to the legal punishment of stealing: amputation, and the minimum value considered by the legal definition of stealing is a quarter of a gold *dinar*. Islam then bases its social issues either on supererogatory spending, or obligatory spending. If people's souls are miserly, and they are unable to give anything more than what is prescribed for them, and the love of wealth settles in their hearts so firmly that they cannot be separated from it, God *the Most High* says to every one of them: You refuse to be separated from your wealth, and I have forbidden usury; so, how can we meet in order to set a sound foundation for society? We will preserve your wealth for you, and prevent you from gaining any usury; and in this way we will meet in the middle of the road: We will not take your wealth, and you will not take from others anything extra on top of this wealth

And the True Lord *the Most High* revealed the verse of credit to explain this; and this verse is the longest verse in the whole of the Quran. Why so? Because upon this credit, the economic issues of society are based for those who do not have an income allowing them to live easily. When the True Lord revealed the verse of credit, He did not issue it as a rigid and dry piece of legislation, but rather phrased it in an emotive way; that is, He combined legislation with emotion, and the True Lord combined the rigidity of the law with the spirit of Islam, and did not do it in a dry style.

When human lawmakers legislate, they issue laws in a dry spiritless fashion; for example, 'Whoever kills must be killed', and so on. But the True Lord *the Most High* does not speak in this way, even with respect to the most violent of disputes, namely disputes of blood: He *the Exalted* says, '...But whoever overlooks from his brother anything, then there should be a suitable follow-up and payment to him with good conduct. This is an alleviation from your Lord and a mercy. But whoever transgresses after that will have a painful punishment' (*al-Baqara*: 178).

And before issuing the verse of credit, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَأَتَقُوا يَوْمًا تُرْجَعُونَ فِيهِ إِلَى اللَّهِ ثُمَّ تُوَفَّى كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا كَسَبَتْ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٨١﴾

Beware of a Day when you will be returned to God, every soul will be paid in full for what it has earned, and no one will be wronged [281] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 281)

We clarified before that fear of God necessitates that we perform the actions that will protect us from God's Attributes of Majesty, and we made it clear that when God says, '...fear the Fire...', it means that we must do that which will place a shield between us and Hellfire, and that hellfire is one of the manifestations of the Attributes of Majesty. And here, the True Lord *the Most High* says to us, 'And fear the Day....' Should we fear the Day itself, or fear what will happen on that Day? A day is a period of time; and times are not feared in themselves, but rather, one has fears of what occurs in those times.

If everything in a certain period of time is frightening, then fear is ascribed to the entire period / day because it is a day of terror in which everything is shocking and frightening – may God save us and you from all the terror of it!

Consider the extreme accuracy of the Quranic expression in God's words: '...you will be returned to God....' The return on this day will not be by the choice of the servants, but rather by the Will of God. On the other hand, when He *the Exalted* speaks about the believers who do good deeds, He says of their return to God on the Day of Resurrection: 'And seek help in steadfast patience and prayer; and this, indeed, is a hard thing for all but the humble in spirit, who know that they shall meet their Lord and that they shall return to Him' (*al-Baqara*: 45-46). This means that the believing servant longs to return to God because he desires to achieve success.

As for the non-believers, the True Lord says that on the Day of Judgement, they will be harshly thrust into the fire (*at-Tur*: 13). The return of the non-believers will be a forced, unwilling return. And the True Lord says that on this day, '...Then every soul will be paid in full that which it has earned, and they will not be treated unjustly.' After this, the True Lord *the Most High* passes the laws of credit, saying:

يَتَّيِبُهَا لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِذَا تَدَايَنْتُمْ بِدَيْنٍ إِلَى أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى فَاكْتُبُوهُ وَلْيَكْتُبَ بَيْنَكُمْ
كَاتِبٌ بِالْعَدْلِ وَلَا يَأْبَ كَاتِبٌ أَنْ يَكْتُبَ كَمَا عَلَّمَهُ اللَّهُ فَلْيَكْتُبْ وَلْيُمْلِلِ الَّذِي
عَلَيْهِ الْحَقُّ وَلْيَتَّقِ اللَّهَ رَبَّهُ وَلَا يَبْخَسْ مِنْهُ شَيْئًا فَإِنْ كَانَ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِ الْحَقُّ سَفِيهًا أَوْ
ضَعِيفًا أَوْ لَا يَسْتَطِيعُ أَنْ يُمِلَّ هُوَ فَلْيُمْلِلْ وَلِيُّهُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَاسْتَشْهِدُوا شَهِيدَيْنِ مِنْ
رِجَالِكُمْ فَإِنْ لَمْ يَكُونَا رَجُلَيْنِ فَرَجُلٌ وَامْرَأَتَانِ مِمَّنْ تَرْضَوْنَ مِنَ الشُّهَدَاءِ أَنْ تَضِلَّ
إِحْدَاهُمَا فَتُذَكِّرَ إِحْدَاهُمَا الْأُخْرَى وَلَا يَأْبَ الشُّهَدَاءُ إِذَا مَا دُعُوا وَلَا تَسْمَعُوا أَنْ تَكْنُبُوهُ
صَغِيرًا أَوْ كَبِيرًا إِلَى أَجَلِهِ ذَلِكُمْ أَقْسَطُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَأَقْوَمُ لِلشَّهَادَةِ وَأَدْنَىٰ أَلَّا تَرْتَابُوا إِلَّا
أَنْ تَكُونَ تِجَارَةً حَاضِرَةً تُدِيرُونَهَا بَيْنَكُمْ فَلَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ أَلَّا تَكْنُبُوهَا
وَأَشْهِدُوا إِذَا تَبَايَعْتُمْ وَلَا يُضَارَّ كَاتِبٌ وَلَا شَهِيدٌ وَإِنْ تَفَعَّلُوا فَإِنَّهُ فُسُوقٌ بِكُمْ
وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٨٢﴾

You who believe, when you contract a debt for a stated term, put it down in writing: have a scribe write it down justly between you. No scribe should refuse to write: let him write as God has taught him, let the debtor dictate, and let him fear God, his Lord, and not diminish [the debt] at all. If the debtor is feeble-minded, weak, or unable to dictate, then let his guardian dictate justly. Call in two men as witnesses. If two men are not there, then call one man and two women out of those you approve as witnesses, so that if one of the two women should forget the other can remind her. Let the witnesses not refuse when they are summoned. Do not disdain to write the debt down, be it small or large, along with the time it falls due: this way is more equitable in God's eyes, more reliable as testimony, and more likely to prevent doubts arising between you. But if the merchandise is there and you hand it over, there is no blame on you if you do not write it down. Have witnesses present whenever you trade with one another, and let no harm be done to either scribe or witness, for if you did cause them harm, it would be a crime on your part. Be mindful of God, and He will teach you: He has full knowledge of everything [282] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 282)

This is the longest verse in the Quran, and God begins it by saying, ‘O you who have believed....’ As we know, this beginning indicates that whatever

ruling which will follow, the grounds of this ruling will be having faith: as long as you believe in God, you implement whatever He commands you with, since God does not hold disbelievers morally responsible, and man – as we said before – is free either to accept faith in God, or not.

If a man does accept faith, let him respond to every ruling of God by adhering to it. We will give an example of this – and God is beyond compare: If a person is ill, he is free either to go the doctor, or not; but once he goes to the doctor and he writes him a prescription, the patient does not ask the doctor – who is a created being like him – ‘Why did you prescribe this treatment?’ The doctor could reply, ‘You were free to choose whether to come to me, or not, but now, that you have come, listen to my words and follow them.’ The doctor does not explain all the chemical interactions and equations, but rather, he diagnoses the complaint and prescribes the treatment.

what is the case when we accept to have faith in *the Most High Creator*? We obey all His commands; and God only commands the believer based on wisdom, and the effects of this wisdom might become clear to the believer later on so that his trust in his faith in God increases. The True Lord says, ‘O you who have believed, when you contract a debt for a specified term, write it down....’ If we reflect on the True Lord’s words ‘contract a debt’ (*tadayantum*), we find that there is the word *dayn* (‘credit’); and we have the word *din* (‘religion’); one of the meanings of (*din*) is ‘requit,’ and another meaning of *din* is religion, the Way of Heaven; as for *dayn*, it means borrowing something for an appointed term for its return. So we have three clear meanings: there is *din* meaning ‘requit,’ and *din* meaning the Way of Heaven (‘religion’), and *dayn* meaning borrowing money (‘credit’).

With His words ‘contract a debt’ (*tadayantum bi-dayn*) God wants to remove any possible ambiguity of two possible meanings so that there would only be one possible meaning, so, He added the word ‘debt (*bi-dayn*); the transaction here, therefore, is one of credit, not requital or religion. And the True Lord specifies that credit be for a stated term, and God used the word ‘specified’ to give further specification; for there is a difference between a term based on a specific time and a term based on a specific event which will occur: if you say, ‘I set the term to be the moment when the pilgrims arrive,’

this is an event in time, and no one can guarantee the exact moment when the pilgrims will arrive, since the plane might be delayed, or one of the pilgrims might be ill so that the rest have to be kept in the quarantine. But if you specify the term as being two or three months, this means that the term is the time itself. So it is not right for someone to set the term for his credit based on some event that is supposed to take place at a future time because it is possible that the event might not happen at the expected time. Therefore, contracting a debt for a specified term requires that the time be stated.

The True Lord specifies for us: ‘...when you contract a debt for a specified term, write it down....’ The words ‘write it down’ are a means of lifting embarrassment and inconvenience between loved ones. This is Divine legislation, so no one should be lax and say to his friend, ‘We are friends;’ it is a Divine Legislation which says to you, ‘Set down credit in writing.’ And do not say, ‘We are friends,’ for one of you might die, and if you have not set the credit in writing as a matter of necessity, then what will the sons do, and the widow, and the heirs?

So, the True Lord’s insistence on setting credit in writing is a command from God which removes difficult inconvenience between loved ones. Many people think that by setting down credit in writing, God wants to protect the interest of the creditor; no; the intention of this is to protect the debtor because if the debtor knows that the debt is recorded, he will try his utmost to work and repay his debt; as for if the credit is not recorded, he might become indolent in working to repay the debt, and because of this, he and his family will only obtain their need a single time after which wealthy society will forsake poor society and refuse to lend to them, and take the inability of this person to repay as an excuse for doing this; and this person who did not repay his debt will bear the cumulative responsibility for this because his actions have served to close the door on goodly loans.

God wants the mechanism of economic life to function for those who are without wealth; because those who possess wealth are able to manage their own lives whilst those who do not possess wealth are in need. For this reason, there is a proverb in the Egyptian countryside which says, ‘If someone takes and gives back, all wealth becomes his.’ He borrows and then pays back, so, everybody trusts him and sees him as trustworthy, diligent, and faithful, and they know of him that when he takes, he gives back; so, all wealth becomes his wealth.

So, by ordaining the setting down in writing of credit, God *the Most High* wants to protect the motions of life for the one who does not possess wealth because the one who possesses wealth, does not need to borrow. For this reason, the command came from the True Lord *the Most High*: ‘...when you contract a debt for a specified term, write it down....’ But who is it that should write down the credit transaction?

Look at the accuracy in the expression: it is not you, the creditor, who will write it down, nor you, the debtor; but rather, there must be a scribe apart from these two, who does not stand to gain any benefit from the credit transaction: ‘...And let a scribe write [it] between you in justice. Let no scribe refuse to write as God has taught him....’ This contains a clarification that if someone who knows how to write is asked to write down a credit record, he should not refuse to do so. Why? Because the verse – the verse of credit – was revealed at a time when literacy amongst the Arabs was rare, and only a few people knew how to write, so, there was an intense demand for those who knew how to write. But if none of those who know how to write are asked to write down the credit transaction, what should they do? The True Lord commands those who know how to write to volunteer, and the plain command comes to state this: ‘and let a scribe write’; for if there is something which a person is required to do, but circumstance does not allow any prior experimentation, the Sacred Law obliges that he put himself forward for this task.

Suppose you are on a ship and a violent storm comes, and the one steering the ship is drowned, or is unable to steer. At this point, someone who knows how to steer a ship must come forward and appoint himself to do this task, for there is no time for any experimentation as known when the True Lord *the Most High* told us of the drought in the story of our master Joseph: Joseph told the king’s messenger how to weather the drought. They will sow for seven years as usual; but they should let all the grains that they harvest remain untouched in their ears, excepting only a little, from which they may eat. After that period of seven good years there will come seven hard years which will consume all that they will have laid up for them, excepting only a little of that which they shall have kept in store (*Yusuf*: 47-48). Then our master Joseph told the king to put him in charge of the store-houses of the land as he is a good and knowing keeper (*Yusuf*: 55).

It was a drought, so, there was no time for experimentation; and he was qualified for this mission and possessed the talents of preservation and know-how, so, he put himself forward for the task. Likewise here ‘...Let no scribe refuse to write as God has taught him...’ if he is asked; and if he is not asked and appointed, then ‘...let him write....’

This is the reason for the two commands here; and as long as the purpose of writing is to record the credit transaction, who is the weak party? It is the debtor, and the written record will be evidence against him for the creditor. For this reason, God specified that the one who dictates, should be the one who contracts the debt, that is, he should dictate the wording of the document which will be an evidence against him: ‘...and let the one who has the obligation dictate....’ Why is it not the creditor who dictates? Because the debtor is usually the weaker party, and perhaps when the time comes to write the date of repayment, the creditor might try to make this date too soon, and the debtor might be too shy to speak up about this and remain silent because he is the weaker party. God chooses the weaker party to be the one to dictate the wording of the credit record; he can dictate it at his own comfort, and thus it is assured that he will not be disadvantaged by his need at any point.

But what do we do when the one who contracts the debt is weak of mind or body, or is unable to dictate? The True Lord sets the rules in this case: ‘...But if the one who has the obligation is of limited understanding, or weak or unable to dictate himself, then let his guardian dictate in justice....’ The weak-minded person is the one who has reached manhood, but does not possess the aptitude to act on his own behalf, and the weak person is the one who does not possess the power to make him mentally mature enough to make transactions, such as if he is a young child, or an old man who has reached such old age that he has forgotten what he used to know, or someone who is unable to dictate because he is mute. In such a case, the guardian, or custodian, or advisor, must dictate in their stead.

Then, further documentation comes with God’s words: ‘...And bring to witness two witnesses from among your men. And if there are not two men [available], then a man and two women from those whom you accept as witnesses – so that if one of the women errs, then the other can remind her....’

Look at the accuracy of the documentation in the instruction of the True Lord: ‘...And bring to witness two witnesses....’ We call upon witnesses and we set it down in writing because God wants, by this documentation, to safeguard the economic life of the one who has not; for when needs are secured for those who have not, the mechanism operates smoothly and the motions of economic life proceed because those who have are in the minority, and those who have not are in the majority, and every good and beneficial project needs a hundred people to implement the plan.

The one who provides finance for the project may need a hundred people to carry it out, and for this reason the majority of people are have-nots, and this is so that the system of life can proceed; for God does not want the system of life to be a matter of some people doing voluntary favours for others, but rather, God wants the system of life to be an essential system; for the worker who does not have a family to support might not bother going out to work, which is why God links his going out to work with his need. He needs food and supplies for himself and his family, so, he is forced by necessity to go out to work, and the repeated experience makes him feel affection for his work, and when he feels affection for his work, he loves it for its own sake.

In this way, he moves from a position of needing to work to a position of loving work for its own sake; and when he loves work for its own sake, the wheel of life moves forward. The True Lord *the Most High* identifies the witnesses by saying, ‘...And bring to witness two witnesses....’

Why did He use the emphatic form of the word *shaheedayn* (‘witnesses’), and not *shahidayn* (‘witnesses/onlookers’)? Because a mere onlooker might be false, so, the True Lord used the Arabic emphatic adjectival form, as though this means a witness who is known for the fairness of his testimony so that he is considered a ‘trustworthy witness’ (*shahid*). He is someone who has repeatedly given just testimony, and people trust him to do this, and this shows that he is a suitable witness. And if there are not two men to be witnesses, the True Lord specifies for us: ‘...then a man and two women from those whom you accept as witnesses....’

The True Lord *peace and blessings be upon him* asked us to do our best, that is, to choose witnesses from those whom we find acceptable; and He gave the

reason why two women are called upon in place of one man by saying, '...so that if one of the women errs, then, the other can remind her....' This is because to give testimony implies being in close contact with society in order to bear witness to it and know what is going on therein, and women are generally far from this.

The general situation of women is that they have very little to do with these affairs, and they have no involvement in these transactions; so, if the situation calls for a woman's witnessing, the witnessing should be done by a man and two women because generally woman's thoughts are not occupied with the economic society which surrounds them, and one of them might make a mistake or forget, in which case the other can remind her, and they can both carefully study the matter together; for it is not the obligation of women to be closely involved with the affairs of the wide society, especially where labour is concerned.

After this, the True Lord says, '...And let not the witnesses refuse when they are called upon....' Just as the True Lord said that the scribe must not refuse to write up the credit transaction, the same is the case for being witness to the transaction. And what is the mode of the witnessing: is it concerned with the contraction of the debt, or the repaying of it? There are two stages: contracting, and repaying.

When we ask someone to come and bear witness to a credit transaction, he is not allowed to refuse; and this is the contraction. And after we have gone ahead with the loan, and we ask this witness to come before the judge and testify before him, this is the repayment stage. In this way, the witnesses must not refuse when they are called both at the stage of contraction, and the stage of repayment.

But the True Lord *the Most High* knows that every human being has his area of working in life, so, no one action should transgress against any other action. When the witness is called forth for either the stage of contraction first or repayment later, his own interests must not be impeded. His interests should not be impeded because he is just, and he is a witness; and so God ordained a ruling in this regard, saying, '...Let no scribe be harmed or any witness....'

So, the act of witnessing here requires us to respect the circumstances of the witness: if the witness has work, or an exam, or a deal to attend to, or

something else, we may say to the witness: ‘You must be appointed this at the stage of contraction since there is no one else who can be trusted and viewed with confidence; as for the stage of repayment, you are compelled to attend.’ The witness can go to take care of the important things he has to attend to since no action should be allowed to transgress against any other action; for this reason, we must look for a witness who has the ability to control his work schedule to a certain extent; and if we do not find anyone else, what do we do? The True Lord said, ‘...Let no scribe be harmed or any witness....’ So, we must find some sort of payment for him to compensate for what he loses out on; we must not force him to neglect his own work, otherwise his honesty will be a source of harm for him because every person who is asked to be a witness, will have his work and interests hampered, and God does not protect the creditor and debtor by harming the scribe or the witness.

God uses of the word ‘harmed’ (*yudarr*) and this word can have two possible lexical meanings: in one meaning, it can be that the harm comes from the scribe, or the witness, and in the other, it means that the harm falls upon the scribe, or the witness. The word is the same, but since the final two root letters of the verb are combined, by taking them apart we can see what the meaning is. We may vocalise the verb thus: */yudarri/*, with the vowel *-i/* at the end, and in this case it means that the harm comes from the scribe, by his falsifying what he writes, or the harm comes from the witness, by his testifying dishonestly.

And if we say ‘...Let no scribe be harmed or any witness....’ with the vocalisation */yudarra*, with the vowel *-a/* at the end, what is being prohibited is that any harm should fall upon the scribe or witness from those for whom the writing is being done, and those for whom the witnessing is obliged, in order for the creditor to be assured of the money he lends, and to be certain that he will definitely get it back.

The scribe and the witness are two people who have their own lives, and each has a job which he does to obtain his livelihood; and if it is known that a scribe or witness is honest, he will therefore be called forth all the time by those who have an interest in contracting credit, and because of this, the interests of the scribe or witness might be hampered.

God wants to ensure, for this scribe or witness, that his interests will be preserved, which is why the laws set down in the Noble Quran address this

principle, which is that if a witness is called from somewhere to be witness over a case, the travel expenses he incurs going to and from the case, must be paid for him, and if he is required to spend the night, he has the right to spend the night so that he does not incur harm by bearing witness, and so that the witness does not have to neglect his work, or pay his costs from his own pocket. The True Lord *the Most High* also wants to secure the interests of everyone, not the interest of one group at the expense of another.

The True Lord then, says of this 'harm', '...For if you do so, indeed, it is [grave] disobedience in you....' That is, if you do harm in either this way, or that, it will be sinful conduct on your part. He *the Exalted* warns us against any harm coming from the scribe or witness, or against any harm falling upon the scribe, or witness. To do harm is considered sinful, that is, disobedience.

The root word of 'disobedience' (*fusooq*) is *fisq*, which originally means for a ripe date to break free of its shell. When a fresh, hard date becomes soft, the shell breaks away from the root of the date and the fruit comes out of the shell, and this is call *fisq* in Arabic; from this root was derived the meaning of *fusooq* 'disobedience,' which means to break away from the obedience of God in all that He commands.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says, 'And fear God'; and we learnt before the meaning of 'fear of God,' when God says 'fear God,' or He *the Exalted* says, 'fear the Fire,' or He says, 'And fear a day when you will be returned to God...' (*al-Baqara*: 281). All of these concepts are based on the concept of a shield (*wiqaya*) from God's Attributes of Majesty, His Might, and His Overwhelming Power. When we say 'fear the Fire,' the fire of hell is one of the forces of God's Attributes of Overwhelming Power; so, 'fear God' is exactly akin to 'fear the Fire,' which is exactly akin to '...fear a day when you will be returned to God....' The True Lord *the Most High* also says, '...And fear God. And God teaches you....' And here there is a principle of faith which we must take from all of God's instructions of moral responsibility. If instructions come from one human being to another, you only obey a human being's instruction if he convinces you of its wisdom and purpose because the instruction is coming from one who is equal to you, and no one's intellect is greater than the other. You might say to the one who gives you instruction,

‘Why should I do as you say when you do not do as I say? If you want to instruct me to do something, and you are my equal in humanity and fallibility, then, you had better convince me of the wisdom of your instruction.’

But if the instruction comes from a Higher Power, the True Lord *the Most High*, the God in whose Power, Knowledge, Wisdom, and lack of selfish desire, we have faith, then, in this situation the believer accepts the command before searching for any wisdom behind it because the wisdom behind this command is that it comes from God. And when the believer obeys the instruction which comes from God, he will come to know the secret of this wisdom later on; for the secrets of God’s wisdoms come to the believer after he accepts to carry out his religious responsibilities.

For example, the True Lord *the Most High* does not convince His servant of the secrets of fasting; but if the believing servant fasts as God told him to, upon fasting, the believer will find the effect of the wisdom of fasting in his soul in a way that could not possibly have convinced him before he experienced it. When the believer carries out his religious responsibilities, God *the Most High* teaches him the wisdom of these responsibilities. We have a clear evidence for this from God’s words to the believers that if they fear God, He will provide them with a standard by which to discern the true from the false, will efface their misdeeds, and will forgive them their sins; and God is limitless in His great favour (*al-Anfal*: 29).

God *the Most High* promises His believing servants that if they fear Him, He will grant them indicators to tell the true from the false, and he will blot out their misdeeds, and forgive them. Why? Because God Who teaches us is the True Lord *the Most High*, the Knower of all things, and God’s Knowledge is intrinsic; as for human knowledge, it might be the result of the pressure of events on him, in a way that he thinks of ways to legislate to remove the evils that afflict him; but the knowledge of *the Most High* and All Knowing precedes this because it is intrinsic knowledge.

We saw before that God *the Most High* gave the issue of credit this much attention in order to secure the purity and soundness of life’s motions; for the one who has no wealth has no way to move in life except by three things: either donations, that is voluntary gifts from benevolent people by which he

can gain help in moving around in his life; the second is the *zakat* (poor-due) which God has made obligatory; and the third means is borrowing, in the manner that God has ordained.

When a poor believer finds no one to donate anything to him, or cannot get any *zakat* money, what can he do? He has to take a loan. So borrowing is the third resort for the economic life of those who have no wealth. We have learnt that God rewards loan with a greater reward than that He gives for charity because when you give charity, it leaves your soul right away, so, you do not think of it again; yet, in the case of a loan, your soul remains attached to it because you still remain the owner of the money; and every time you have patience for it, you earn more reward from God for every act of patience you extend to the debtor.

We know also that the True Lord *the Most High* made assurances for the credit process which we must understand from two angles: The first angle is that He thereby preserved the fruit of a man's labour in life, which is that he, by his labour, produces and possesses money. If we do not protect the fruits of his labour in life for him, he will not take work seriously; and if he does not take work seriously, many interests will be wasted because a person's work in life benefits many people whether he intends this, or not; we gave the example for this of someone who possesses wealth and wants to build an apartment building; so, God directs an inspiration in the form of a notion in the mind to him; and God says that no one can know the forces and the soldiers of the Lord but He (*al-Muddaththir*: 31).

So, the man says: Why should I hoard this wealth? Why should I not build an apartment building so that I can benefit from the rents? In this way, the money will not decrease, but will increase. And the man does not have any thoughts of benefitting others; he is concerned only with his own benefit; yet, even if he does not intend to benefit others, his action will benefit others nonetheless: the one who digs the ground, will be paid for this, and the one who lays the bricks, will be paid for this, and everyone who participates in the making of this building, either by construction, or installation of electricity and water, or decoration – every one of these people will be paid for this. So everyone benefits even if the investor does not have this in mind.

So, the True Lord wants to protect a person's work in life; for if God did not protect the fruit of his labour in life, the worker would suffice himself with enough to sustain himself and his dependants; and as for the weak person, who would support him? So, we must protect the wealth of the worker so that he will be encouraged to work. When God, the One Who gave people their provisions, asks the strong worker to give his weak, needy brother a loan, He does not say, 'Give a loan to the needy,' but rather, He *the Exalted* says, 'Who is it that would lend to God a goodly loan?' (*al-Baqara*: 245).

God *the Most High* respected the work of the working person in life, and considered wealth to be of the possession of the worker; so, God does not say to the worker: Give the needy person from the wealth which I gave to you; no; the wealth belongs to the worker, so, God says to him: Give Me a loan, for your brother is in need of it. We can only say – to illustrate, not to compare, for God is beyond compare – suppose you take something from your son's money box to help his brother, and you promise the son from whom you took the money that you will give him a lot in return. The money which you have taken from your son's savings as a loan, is the money which you gave to him in the first place.

So, God wants to protect life's motions; and if life's motions are not protected, no person will feel secure about his labour's fruits, and all life will be corrupted, and bitterness and resentment will become prevalent; and this is why God *the Most High* tells the believers that He does not demand of them to sacrifice in His Way all of their possessions because if He were to demand of them all of their possessions, and urge them, they would niggardly cling to them, and so He would but bring out their moral failings (*Muhammad*: 36-37).

When resentment spreads through society, there can never be any good in this society. So when the True Lord ordains the documentation of the debt contract, He wants to protect the work of the worker; for people differ among themselves in the ambition of their actions, and not all people have ambitious actions, but only some of them have. So let us make use of the ambitious actions that some people have because they will thereby benefit society, whether they intend to or not.

Furthermore, the True Lord *the Most High* wants also to protect man from himself; because when the debtor knows that the debt which he owes is contractually bound, and he has no way of denying it, he will try his best to work in life to pay it back; and when a person works to pay back his debt, this increases the amount of work in life, and the benefit thus increases.

In this way, we see that God wanted, by ordaining documentation of debts, to protect the debtor from his own self; for circumstances might come upon the debtor which would induce him to be lax in repaying his debt, and if he is lax, the loss will not be for him alone, but he will become an example for everyone else, and all those who have wealth would say, 'I will not give anyone any loan, because so-and-so, who was wealthy like me, gave to so-and-so the needy person, and he was lax with the money and used it all up.' At this point, the motions of life will come to a standstill. But if the credit is well documented and set in writing, the debtor will be eager to pay it back. God wants to preserve the motions of life in a way which is permanent, honest, noble and pure, which is why we find that in the verse of credit the word 'writing' and other words derived from its Arabic root (k-t-b) are repeated more than once – indeed many times: 'O you who have believed, when you contract a debt for a specified term, write it down. And let a scribe write [it] between you in justice. Let no scribe refuse to write as God has taught him. So let him write and let the one who has the obligation dictate. And let him fear God, his Lord, and not leave anything out of it. But if the one who has the obligation is of limited understanding or weak or unable to dictate himself, then let his guardian dictate in justice. And bring to witness two witnesses from among your men. And if there are not two men [available], then a man and two women from those whom you accept as witnesses – so that if one of the women errs, then the other can remind her. And let not the witnesses refuse when they are called upon. And do not be averse to write it, whether it is small or large, for its [specified] term. That is more equitable in the sight of God and stronger as evidence and more likely to prevent doubt between you, except when it is an immediate transaction which you conduct among yourselves. For [then] there is no blame upon you if you do not write it. And take witnesses when you conclude a contract. Let no scribe be harmed or any

witness. For if you do so, indeed, it is [grave] disobedience in you. And fear God. And God teaches you. And God is Knowing of all things.’

This repetition in this verse of mentioning the action of writing gives the basis of relations between people; for writing is the basis of the contract, and it does not cheat because if you record something on paper, the paper will not come and deny what you wrote on it; but in the case of witnessing, things might be different, as it is possible that the witness might bend to someone’s influence and deny the truth. For this reason, the True Lord presents to us a new matter of faith when He says, ‘...to write as God has taught him....’ This means that the scribe should write according to how God has taught him the skills of writing; or, alternatively ‘...as God has taught him...’ might mean that God was good to him by teaching him to write – something that not many others are skilled at – so, just as God was good to him, he must be good to others, and pass onto them the benefits of his writing.

It is not only a matter of writing, as this includes and incorporates every gift and talent by which God has distinguished any person from among the talents which God gives to His creatures; the believer is the one who acts in a way which passes on the effects of his blessing and talent to others, and you must pass on the effects which the talents of others have on you so that other people can benefit from them too. In this way, goodness and benefit will spread everywhere; for if you have a talent, you have a single talent which will suffice you in a single area of your life, and when you pass it on to everyone else and transfer it to them, so, everyone will use their communal talents for your benefit; and which of these is the greater benefit?

When you pass on and transfer your talent to other people, you are the one who benefits the most because everyone will pass on and transfer their talents to you. And if you work well for others, the work which you have to offer is one work, and when you do it well, God controls the notions which come to those who work for you and inspires them to do a good job for you, just as you did a good job for others. After this, the True Lord *the Most High* stresses to us the extreme importance of documentation and the written contract, saying:

وَأِنْ كُنْتُمْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ وَلَمْ تَجِدُوا كَاتِبًا فَرِهَنْ مَقْبُوضَةً فَإِنْ أَمِنَ بَعْضُكُمْ
بَعْضًا فَلْيُؤَدِّ الَّذِي أُؤْتِمِنَ أَمْنَتَهُ وَلْيَتَّقِ اللَّهَ رَبَّهُ وَلَا تَكْتُمُوا الشَّهَادَةَ
وَمَنْ يَكْتُمْهَا فَإِنَّهُ آثِمٌ قَلْبُهُ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٨٣﴾

**If you are on a journey, and cannot find a scribe, something should be handed over as security, but if you decide to trust one another, then let the one who is trusted fulfil his trust; let him be mindful of God, his Lord. Do not conceal evidence: anyone who does so has a sinful heart, and God is fully aware of everything you do [283]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 283)**

As we know, a 'journey' entails leaving the routine of life in one's home; and the routine of life in one's home makes one completely aware of the constituents of his life whilst journeying takes a person out of his life's routine so that he cannot do many of the things he does when he is at home. Suppose you are travelling, and you are forced to take a loan, yet you cannot find a scribe, or a witness: what do you do?

The True Lord gives us the answer: '...then a pledge [should be] taken....' So God did not leave aside the matter of credit even when one is on a journey; He legislated not only for cases when one is resident, but also for cases of travel: '...then a pledge [should be] taken....' So, when one is resident, there is writing and witnessing, and when one is on a travel, there is a pledge in hand, the purpose of which is to protect a person from the various pressures of society.

But does the True Lord *the Most High* prevent aspirations of altruism? Does the True Lord *the Most High* prevent chivalry in transactions? Does the True Lord *the Most High* prevent the ideals of valour from pervading dealings of people? No. The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...And if one of you entrusts another, then let him who is entrusted discharge his trust [faithfully]....' This is the aspiration of faith; and God did not block the way for valour or altruism in transactions. The writing of the debt, the witnessing, and the pledge are not obligatory since God says, '...And if one of you entrusts another, then let him who is entrusted discharge his trust [faithfully]....'

Also, you might understand that the one who is trusted is the debtor, to which we say: No; the matter is subject to change; there is a pledge, and this means that there are two matters here: the first is the 'debt' and the second is the 'pledge,' which is equivalent to the debt since one person is entrusted with regard to the pledge in his hand, whilst the other is entrusted with regard to the debt. For this reason, the wise words of the verse here refer to the one who takes the pledge and the one who takes the debt, which means that the one who takes the pledge, must fulfil his trust, and the other must fulfil his debt. And when we rise to this level of transactions, the thing which keeps a man in check is not the binding contract which is outside him, but rather, it is the binding of faith within his soul; but can we be certain that this binding of faith exists within all people?

Can we be certain of the circumstances? We cannot; for the trustworthiness of faith might exist at the time the debt is contracted and taken, but we cannot be sure that the trustworthiness of faith, will still exist when the time of repayment comes since someone might come to you and say, 'I have one hundred pounds; I want you to keep it as a trust for me with you.' The meaning of a 'trust' is that there is no contract and no witnesses, and it is all based on honesty and trust: if you wish, you can admit to the hundred pounds, and if you wish you can deny it. The man who does this with you, asks you to guarantee the hundred pounds with your faithful sense of honesty, and it is possible that you could say to him when he does this with you, 'Yes, I will keep the hundred pounds with the utmost trust,' with the intention of giving it back to him the moment he asks for it; but you cannot be sure of the circumstances of life for you, since as a human being you are subject to the vicissitudes of fate. It is possible that life might put such pressure on you that you are lax in returning the trust to him, or that you deny it, saying to the one who trusted you, 'Get away from me, I cannot control myself now at the time of repayment even if I could control myself at the time I took it.'

Trust, in its general meaning, is a universal matter of existence, but the verse at hand deals with it from a specific angle. The True Lord *the Most High* deals with it in its general sense in all existence when He *the Exalted* says that indeed He 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, indeed, he has always been prone to be most wicked, most foolish (*al-Ahzab*: 72).

The entire universe feared for itself from bearing the burden of trust which meant that trust would be a matter of volition and free will, and no being in the universe was sure that it would be able to deliver when the time of implementation came. All these beings announced their decision, and refused to bear the burden of trust, as though they said: O Lord, we want to be subjugated and compelled with no free will. For this reason, we find that everything in the universe fulfils its purpose as God *the Most High* planned, except for man; that is, he was the one who accepted, with his intelligence and deliberation, to bear the trust of free will, and either by state or word he said: I am able to bear this trust because I am able to choose between alternatives.

Here, we remind man: You might be strong at the moment of assuming the responsibility, but what will be your condition when the time to fulfil it comes? This is why God said that man took up the trust – for indeed, he has always been prone to be most wicked, most foolish. Man wronged himself when he assumed the burden of trust yet did not discharge it properly, so, he is wicked; and he is foolish because he took the time of assumption into consideration, but not the time of fulfilment; or he did consider it, but then he broke the promise he had made himself to fulfil it.

So, even if man was sure he would fulfil the trust, he is subject to vicissitudes, which is why the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...And do not be averse to write it, whether it is small or large, for its [specified] term. That is more equitable in the sight of God...’ (*al-Baqara*: 282). Writing the transaction down is an opportunity for a person to protect himself from weakness when the time of repayment comes, for God *the Most High* wants the matter to be guaranteed by contract so that you do not only rely on your own faithful honesty, but you are also subject to the binding contract which is exterior to your faithfulness; and this is achieved by writing down the debt transaction whether it is small, or big, together with the time at which it falls due.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...And do not hide testimony....’ The command ‘do not hide’ is extremely expressive since the word ‘testimony’

implies ‘that which you have seen’; and since you saw it, this means it is a reality, and realities can never change. For this reason, the person who tells a true story, will never change the way he tells this story even if he tells it a thousand times because he is invoking a reality. On the other hand, the liar invokes something which is not real, which is why he says one thing and then, forgets the lie he told before, and so tells a different lie because he is not invoking something real. The word ‘witnessed’ means something which was actually seen; and as long as it was really seen and witnessed, it urges the one who saw it to tell it. So beware of hiding it because ‘to hide’ means that something wants to come out and you try to prevent it from doing so. This is why God *the Most High* says, ‘...And do not hide testimony....’ It is as though the natural disposition of faith urges the one who possesses it to speak of what he has witnessed because it is real. Because of this, the command comes from the True Lord: ‘...And do not hide testimony, for whoever hides it – his heart is indeed sinful....’ One might ask, ‘Is concealment here an attribute of the heart, or of the person who did not speak of what he witnessed?’ A poet said:

Speech lies in the heart,

The tongue is but the heart’s interpreter.

Whenever God emphasises something, he mentions the body part which is related to this matter. You say, ‘I saw it with my eyes; and I heard it with my ears; and I gave it with my hand; and I walked to it on my feet’: you mention the body part which plays a part in this matter.

When the True Lord says, ‘...for whoever hides it – his heart is indeed sinful...,’ know that all the body parts are subject to the heart; ‘...and God is Knowing of what you do.’ That is, your concealment of the truth does not change the reality of God’s knowledge in the slightest. And when the transaction of credit and its contraction and conditions are settled, whether it is at home, or on a journey, God preserves, for the man who works in life, a work which is noble and pure.

If this is not the case, all interests in the society will be in jeopardy and will be brought to a standstill; and what will the one who is unable to work do for a living? His heart will fill with resentment towards the wealthy, and he

will hate the blessings that they enjoy; and when the needy person hates the blessings of his wealthy brother, the blessing itself will hate to go to the one who hates it for his brother. These are matters which the True Lord *the Most High* has planned to be connected with one another.

The blessing loves the blessed one more than the blessed one loves the blessing, and it goes to the one to whom God sends it lovingly; so, if someone hates to see the blessing go to the blessed one, the blessing will refuse to go to him, as though it is saying to him: You will not get any good from me. If anyone wants to know about this, let him try it for himself.

Love the blessings that others enjoy, and you will find that everyone's blessings are at your service. If you love the blessings that others have, they will come to you to serve you. Moreover, the believer must know that some blessings are not born of effort and striving, but blessing might be simply out of the grace of God which He grants to some of His creatures; and when you hate to see them with the one blessed by them, you are thereby objecting to God's decree of blessing; and when you object to God's decree of blessing, the True Lord *the Most High* will not allow you to benefit anything from them.

If you see someone withholding his blessings from his relatives, know that they hate to see him with these blessings; if they loved them, the blessings would rush to them. The Divine way wants to make people a single, cooperative, and self-completing entity so that if I see that you have obtained a blessing, I love to see it with you; and when I love to see the blessing with you, this blessing will in turn be given to me, and you will find no difference between the haves and the have-nots; you only find differences between haves and have-nots in societies which pay no regard to God's Law.

We said this in connection with the situation when a person is forced to take a usurious loan because he finds no one to give him a goodly loan, and finds no one to fulfil God's obligation upon them of the poor-due in order to meet his need, so, he is forced to take a usurious loan. In this way, the usurious society enters into a war with God; and does anyone have the strength to enter into a war with God? No. And the usurious society also enters into a war with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* forbade usury, and said in his sermon in the Farewell Pilgrimage, ‘All usury is hereby annulled, yet you are entitled to your principal; and you will do no wrong, nor will you be wronged. God decreed that there is to be no usury, and the usury of ‘Abbas ibn ‘Abd Al-Muttalib is all annulled.’ The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* started with annulling the usury of his uncle.

This is the loftiness of Divine legislation; those who make human legislation seek to protect their relatives from the law, yet, Divine legislation imposes its application on the relatives before anyone else. The example of this is ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab *God be pleased with him*: when ‘Umar wanted to enforce a law, he would first command his family and relatives to obey it, saying, ‘I will do (such-and-such), and by God in whose hand is my soul, if anyone of you disobeys me in this I will make an example of him to the Muslims.’ And ‘Umar *God be pleased with him* would announce this to all people; and why would he announce this? Because many people tend to make allowances for rulers (by being lenient with their relatives) when the rulers themselves might not be aware of this; we might find someone going to a group of people and, on the strength of his family name, getting what he wants from the people against their wishes by intimidating them; and the ruler might not be aware that this behaviour is going on.

But when the ruler announces to the people and to his relatives that there will be no distinction where the implementation of his law is concerned, and that the law applies to himself and his family, whoever uses the ruler’s name, or tries anything like this, will face the consequences for his actions; and in this way, things will be upright. But if, after the period of reign of the rulers has come to an end, facts come to light of their relative’s abuses, we will say: Why we know all this from the start? And where were these facts when they actually occurred?

The Muslim ruler must announce to his subjects that laws must be applied to him first of all, and to his dependants. Because of this, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said at the Farewell Pilgrimage, ‘The usury of *al-Jahiliya* (the pre-Islamic times) is hereby annulled, and the first usury I annul is our usury: the usury of ‘Abbas ibn ‘Abd Al-Muttalib, which is hereby all annulled.’⁽¹⁾

(1) Narrated by Muslim in *Khutbat Al-Wada’ fi Hujjat Al-Wada’*

And at the battle of Badr, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* brought out the people of his own family to fight; If no one from his family come out to fight, someone from the disbelievers would have said: He is protecting his own family; and if the reward of martyrdom is paradise, why does he send those who are unrelated to him instead of sending his loved ones to fight?

Yet, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* sent forward his relatives and loved ones, and he was well-informed by his Lord about the matter of martyrdom, and how it shortens for a person the toils of life and causes him to enter paradise. In this way, the favouritism at the onset of Islam was based on that which lasts forever, not like the favouritism of fools which is based on that which is ephemeral.

When the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* teaches us this and strikes the hands of those who deal in usury, this is the war which has to be waged: the war of God, the Sovereign, the All-Powerful; as for those who are weak and cannot fight, they do not wage this war because they stand before their Creator and Conqueror, and they cannot wage war against Him. This is why the state must pay attention to these kinds of matters, and establish Islamic laws; and after this, if the obligatory poor-due is not enough to meet the requirements of the needy, the state could impose what it chooses in order to meet the needs of the needy.

After clarifying the matter of doctrine with His words ‘God – there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of [all] existence...’ (*al-Baqara*: 255), and the matter of the law concerning the doctrine with His words ‘There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion...’ (*al-Baqara*: 256), and protecting the doctrine by commanding the believers to fight in order to ensure the ascendancy of God’s word, and then speaking about the economic motions of spending first of all on God’s cause, and then spending on the needy, the True Lord *the Most High* then says:

لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَإِنْ تُبْدُوا مَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَوْ تُخْفُوهُ يُحَاسِبْكُمْ
بِهِ اللَّهُ فَیَغْفِرْ لِمَنْ یَشَاءُ وَیُعَذِّبْ مَنْ یَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَیْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٨٤﴾

**Whatever is in the heavens and in the earth belongs to God and, whether you reveal or conceal your thoughts, God will call you to account for them. He will forgive whoever He will and punish whoever He will: He has power over all things [284]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 284)**

The verse opens with the prepositional phrase ‘To God’ before the main idea of the sentence: ‘...belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth...’ and the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘To God belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth....’ This is the realm in which all creatures exist and no one has ever claimed that the heavens and earth belong to him, but there may be things within the heavens or the earth of which creatures claim ownership. If we look at the good things of this earth, we find that they are sometimes in the ownership of people who have been given ownership of them by God; those human beings who flew up into space and placed all their satellites and space stations, are able to claim their ownership of these satellites and space stations.

The True Lord *the Most High* draws our attention with His words here ‘To God belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth...,’ clarifying for us that although it appears that God has given ownership of means of living to His creatures, He only gave this ownership temporarily, and it will be taken from them later: either they will leave it by dying, or else it will leave them and be taken from them by sale, gift, appropriation, or theft.

The phrase ‘To God’ – coming at the beginning of the sentence – implies exclusivity and restrictedness; everything in existence belongs to God; and no one can claim, because of the causality of what God has given him, that he really possesses anything. Why? Because no human owner can ensure that his own life will continue.

We have never seen anyone who was not subject to vicissitudes; and since vicissitudes affect everyone, we should be aware that God wants His creatures to feel for one another, and complete one another, and He wants His creatures to

cooperate. The True Lord does not do this because the matter is out of His hand – God forbid – no; God is telling us: I possess everything in the heavens and everything in the earth, and I can make it so that things pass around from person to person. For this reason, we say to those who reach high levels of wealth, prestige, or anything else: Beware when a blessing is completed for you. Why? Because if the blessing is completed for you in status, wealth, health, and offspring, you are subject to vicissitudes, and since it has been completed and reached its limit and you are certainly subject to vicissitudes, the blessing will inevitably start to decline. If a person reaches the summit, he must at some point come down from this summit, which is why the poet said:

When something is completed, it begins to diminish:

Expect to see it fade when it is said to be completed.

History has preserved for us the story of the Arab woman who went to see the caliph and said to him, ‘May God complete His blessings for you.’ The people sitting around the caliph heard this and were pleased, and expressed their pleasure; but the caliph said to them, ‘By God, you have not understood what she said. She said, may God complete His blessings for you; and if they are complete they will begin to fade because vicissitudes pursue men.’ This is how the caliph understood the woman’s intention.

A poet said:

My own soul, which owns these things, will depart:

So how can I mourn for anything that it loses?

The soul which possesses things will itself be lost, so, how can one be sad about anything he loses?

The True Lord *the Most High* requires us to always keep this in mind: that all the universe belongs to God, and all human beings, with their selves and their souls and all that they reveal and conceal, do not escape God’s knowledge; and the True Lord *the Most High* does not only hold us to account according to what He knows, but also according to what has been recorded against us.

Everyone will read his own record for himself, as God *the Exalted* says that He has fastened for every human being his fate to his neck; and on the Day of

Resurrection, God will bring forth for him a record which he will find wide open; and he will be told to read his record. Sufficient is his own soul on that day to make out his account (*al-Isra'*: 13-14).

The Reckoning means that every person has an account of all that is for him and all that is against him; and the True Lord *the Most High* explains to us what 'for and against' means by speaking of weighing, as we are familiar with weighing things; He *the Exalted* says that true will be the weighing on that Day: and those whose weight of good deeds is heavy in the balance – it is they, they who shall be successful; whereas those whose weight is light in the balance – it is they who will have wasted their own selves by their wilful wrongdoing (*al-A'raf*: 8-9).

The Reckoning of the True Lord is precise and just: those people, whose scale of good deeds is heavy, are those who will gain the victory of paradise, whilst those who sold themselves to Satan and their soul's caprice, will see that the scale of their ill deeds is heavy, and will thus become the inmates of hell.

So, we are faced with two kinds of people: those whose scale of good deeds is heavier in the balance of the Reckoning, and those whose scale of bad deeds and evils is heavier in the balance of the Reckoning. So what about those whose two scales of deeds are evenly balanced so that their good and ill deeds are equal? They are the people of *al-A'raf* ('the Heights'), who will eventually obtain forgiveness from God because God's forgiveness – and He is the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy – outstrips His wrath. If the case of the people of the Heights was not mentioned in the Quran, someone might have said: God told us about those whose good deeds are heavy, and those whose good deeds are light, but He did not tell us about those whose evils are equal to their good deeds.

But the Forbearing and All Knowing Lord clarified everything for us, and explained that His forgiveness outstrips His wrath; therefore, God *the Most High* does not let it be sufficient with His knowledge when it comes to the Reckoning, but rather He makes a clear precise record, which is why the True Lord *the Most High* reassures us by saying that excepted from torment, however, will be those who repent and believe and do righteous deeds; for it is they whose

previous bad deeds God will transform into good ones – seeing that God is indeed All-Forgiving, All-Merciful (*al-Furqan*: 70).

The True Lord *the Most High* reassures us that we will find all the good that we do in the scale of the balance, and He also assures us that He *the Exalted* will compensate us for the evil which evil people inflict upon us, and that we will take from their good deeds and add them to our balance. So the reassurance comes from two sides: The True Lord assures us that the good we do will not be left out of our account; and He also assures us concerning the evil which people do to us, and tells us that the True Lord will take from their good deeds and transfer them to us.

In observing events in life, we find that God might love many people because of an attribute of goodness which they possess, and this good attribute might be hidden so that other people cannot see it; but God Whose knowledge misses nothing, sees this person's attribute and loves him because of it; and the True Lord sees that this person's good deeds are scant, so, He makes some other people touch this man with their evil and their bad deeds so that He can take from the good deeds of these evil people and add them to this man's good deeds.

The meaning of '...you reveal what is within your souls...' is that you manifest your feelings in the form of practical expressions; but does 'conceal it' mean not to manifest your psychological feelings in the form of practical expressions? No; because not everything has a practical expression. Take love, for example: a person might love, but not find the power of expression to proclaim that he is in love. Likewise, the one who feels hatred, might not have the power of expression to proclaim this resentment. So there are actions which settle in the hearts; but does God hold us to account for what settles in our souls?

This delicate matter requires absolute precision in discussion, and we find that some of the Companions of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* took a position in this matter which caused some of them to weep out of fear for themselves. When 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar *God be pleased with them* heard this verse, he said: 'If God is to take us up for that which we conceal in our souls, we would perish!' And he wept until his sobs could be heard. Ibn 'Abbas *God be pleased with them* heard about this, and he said, 'May God have mercy on Abu 'Abd Ar-Rahman, his fellow Muslims have found the same in

this verse as he found.’ God then, revealed the words that He does not charge any soul with more than it is well able to bear (*al-Baqara*: 286) and the following verse till the end of the chapter.

We should be aware that the inclinations of the soul are many; there is something called a ‘notion or a passing idea,’ and something called an ‘idea,’ and something called a ‘conscious inclination,’ and there is ‘deliberation,’ and ‘resolve.’ These are five states, and the first four of these states are plain; it is the fifth state, where the intention is clear, which we must pay attention to. Let us consider each state in some detail.

A notion is a thought which occurs at once out of a sudden while an idea creeps into the mind little by little; in conscious inclination, the soul is always vacillating; deliberation is to gather all the means and debate about each of the means by which one can attain his desire; as for resolve, or intention, it is to arrive at the conclusion and begin to act upon it. It is resolve or intention which is meant by God *the Most High* when He says, ‘...Whether you reveal what is within your souls or conceal it, God will bring you to account for it...’ And we find that many scholars have pondered over these words, and some scholars have wondered whether, the verse which comes after this saying that He does not charge any soul with more than it is well able to bear (*al-Baqara*: 286) thereby abrogates this verse or not.

But when we realise that this verse is a statement of fact, and that it is not statements of fact which can be abrogated, but rather, only rulings, this calls us to conclude that it is intention and resolve which are being referred to when God *the Most High* says, ‘...Whether you reveal what is within your souls or conceal it, God will bring you to account for it...’ This is what God will hold us accountable for. When the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...Then He will forgive whom He wills...’ Who are these? God has made it clear that those whom He wills to forgive are those who repent, and those who turn back to God, of whom the True Lord said that excepted from torment will be those who repent and believe and do righteous deeds; for it is they whose previous bad deeds God will transform into good ones – seeing that God is indeed All-Forgiving, All-Merciful (*al-Furqan*: 70).

Replacing evil deeds with good deeds is something which the person whom God holds morally responsible, must pause to reflect on in order to see God's grace; for when someone does an evil deed and it then pains him, whenever it pains him that he has done an evil deed and he laments it, God records a good deed for him. But the one who has not done an evil deed is not bothered by this; a sage once said, 'An ill deed which breeds humility and contrition, is better than a good deed which breeds pride and arrogance.'

You can find that much of the goodness in the world comes from those who sinned against themselves in some way, and then, repented of it, but it still continues to give them anguish. One of those might be strong in everything, but he is weak in one matter; and his weakness in it causes him to fall into disobedience, whilst he tries his utmost in those things where he is not weak to do as much good as he can so that God will efface and wipe out this with that. The goodness in the world might well come from people who commit ill deeds and sin against themselves in one thing, so, God *the Most High* wills to make them directed towards many areas of goodness and they would think: Perhaps this will make up for that.

But for the one who continues routinely in this way so that his sin does not disturb him, these matters might remain lukewarm in his soul. For this reason, we must not look at those who sin against themselves from a single perspective, but rather, we must look from multiple perspectives, and we must have good manners with them, and pray that God would forgive them the deeds that we know of them, and bless them for what they have offered, and that God will relieve them from the burden of what they have done of misdeeds.

Some scholars say that God's words '...Then He will forgive whom He wills and punish whom He wills...' mean that God has made forgiveness dependent on the servant: if you want God to forgive you, then, do many good deeds so that God will turn your sins into good deeds; and if you want to be chastised – and no one wants this – then don not do any good deeds.

This matter lets us know that when the True Lord *the Most High* asks us to believe in Him, he gives the reins to us; and simply by believing in Him, we take from Him the reins of free will. The evidence for this is clear from the Sacred Hadith in which Abu Hurayra *God be pleased with him* related that the

Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘God the Glorious and Exalted says: I am as My servant thinks of me, and I am with him when he remembers Me: if he remembers Me to himself, I remember him to Myself; if he remembers Me in an assembly, I remember him in a better assembly; and if he draws nearer to Me by a hand-span, I draw nearer to him by an arm’s length; and if he draws nearer to Me by an arm’s length, I draw nearer to him by a fathom’s length; and if he comes to Me walking, I go to him at speed.’⁽¹⁾

Simply by having faith, God gives you the reins; if you want God to draw an arm’s-length nearer to you, draw a hand’s-span nearer to Him; and if you want God to draw a fathom’s-length nearer to you, draw an arm’s-length nearer to Him. And if you want your Lord to come to you at speed – running – then go to Him walking. Simply by seeing you approaching Him and turning to Him, God will draw nearer to you; it is as though He says to you: No, you relax; I am the One Who will come to you.

This is why we said before when we spoke about prayer that when you believe in God, and then the *mue’dhdhin* calls for the prayer, you go to the prayer; it is true that you go to the obligatory prayer, but has God prevented you from standing before Him at any time? God asked you to stand before Him five times a day, and after this He left the door open for you, O believer; God does not lose interest until the servant loses interest.

In a person’s ordinary life – and God is beyond compare – if he wants to meet an important person, he requests a meeting, and the important person either agrees to meet with the one who requests the meeting, or he declines. If this important person agrees to the meeting, the important person is the one who specifies the time and the place, and he might also request to know the purpose and subject of the meeting. But God leaves the door open for the believing servant; God will meet His servant for any reason, at any time, in any place, and at any moment.

It is enough honour for me that I am a servant

Whose Lord meets with him without an appointment;

(1) Narrated by Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayra God be pleased with him in *Kitab Ad-Dhikr*

Despite His Holy Sanctity,

I can meet with Him wherever and whenever I like.

So, whose hand holds the reins? The reins are in the hand of the believing servant; so, when they say that ‘...Then He will forgive whom He wills...’ means that it is in the hands of men as to whether they are to be forgiven, this means that if they want God to forgive them, they do things which merit this forgiveness, and repent to God, and do many good deeds; and if someone wants to be chastised, let him continue to recklessly do evil deeds.

After this, God *the Glorious and Exalted* says:

ءَامَنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ ۚ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ كُلٌّ ءَامَنَ بِاللَّهِ
وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ ۚ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْ رُسُلِهِ ۚ
وَقَالُوا سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا ۚ غُفْرَانَكَ رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿٢٨٥﴾

The Messenger believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, as do the faithful. They all believe in God, His angels, His scriptures, and His messengers. ‘We make no distinction between any of His messengers,’ they say, ‘We hear and obey. Grant us Your forgiveness, our Lord. To You we all return!’ [285] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 285)

When we reflect on this noble verse, we find that the first instance of belief mentioned is the belief of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘The Messenger has believed in what was sent down to him from his Lord....’ After this comes the belief of those to whom the Messenger delivered the call: ‘...and [so have] the believers....’ After this, the belief of the Messenger becomes intermixed with the belief of the believers: ‘...Each one of them has believed in God and His angels and His books and His messengers, [saying], “We make no distinction between any of His messengers.” And they say, “We hear and we obey. [We seek] Your forgiveness, our Lord, and to You is the [final] destination.”’

That is, both the Messenger and the believers believe in God. The first belief is that of the Messenger of God, and then, also the belief of those who

believed in the Message which the Messenger brought, since the verb ‘believe’ refers to both the Messenger and the believers. And after this, God brings them together – the Messenger and the believers – in a single belief; and this is something natural, since the Messenger of God believed in God first, after which He delivered the Message to us, and we believed in God; and then, the faith became common, and our faith became the faith of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, and the faith of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* became our faith; and this is illustrated in God’s words: ‘...Each one of them has believed in God.’

So, in the first stage, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was the first to believe in God; and when the Messenger believed in God, he was required to believe that he was the Messenger of God; the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* did say, ‘And I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.’ And when something in his own life pleased him, he *peace and blessings be upon him* would say, ‘I testify that I am the Messenger of God,’ and he would say it joyfully.

An example of this is the story narrated by Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah *God be pleased with him*, who said: There was a Jew in Medina who used to give me a loan of dates which I would repay at harvest time – and Jabir owned the land which lay on the road to Rooma – and one year the harvest failed,⁽¹⁾ and when the Jew came to me at harvest-time, I had nothing for him; so, I began to ask him for a year’s extension, and he refused. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was informed of this, so, he said to his Companions: ‘Let us go and ask the Jew to give Jabir more time.’ They came to me at my orchard, and the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* began to speak to the Jew, who said, ‘O Abd Al-Qasim, I will not give him more time.’ When the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* saw this, he stood up and walked around the palms, and then came back and spoke to him again, and he refused. I brought a few soft dates and placed them before the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, and he ate, then he said: ‘Where is your hut, Jabir?’ I told him where it was, and he said, ‘Spread out a blanket there for me.’ I did so, and he went in and took a nap; and when he woke up I brought him some more dates, and he ate them. Then he got up and spoke to the Jew again, and he refused. So he got up and

(1) In another narration, he said, ‘One year the harvest was different from usual.’

walked around the fresh date palms a second time, then said, 'O Jabir, harvest, and pay (your debt),' and he stood in the harvesting area, and I picked from the trees enough to pay my debt and more besides. I went out to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and told him the good news of this, and he said: 'I testify that I am the Messenger of God!'⁽¹⁾

And the True Lord *the Most High* testifies that there is no deity but Him: God Himself gives evidence – and so do the angels and all who are endowed with knowledge – that there is no deity save Him, the Upholder of Equity: there is no deity save Him, *the Almighty*, the Truly Wise (*Al-'Imran*: 18).

So, God testifies that there is no deity but Him, and the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* testifies that there is no deity but God, and he also testifies that he is the Messenger of God, who passes all of this on to the believers so that the formation of belief is completed. This is why the True Lord says of this, '...Each one of them has believed in God and His angels and His books and His messengers....' And the True Lord uses the word 'Each' (*kull*) in the Arabic indefinite form to mean both the Messenger and the believers.

God then, lists for us the components of faith: '...Each one of them has believed in God and His angels and His books and His messengers, [saying], 'We make no distinction between any of His messengers.' And they say, 'We hear and we obey. [We seek] Your forgiveness, our Lord, and to You is the [final] destination.' We know that belief in God, and everything connected with belief, must be a matter of the unseen, and there can be no such thing as faith in tangible things. Faith is not concerned with tangible things, since they can be seen. The components of belief in this verse are as follows:

Belief in God Who is Unseen; and belief in the angels, who are unseen creations of God, and had God not informed us that He has creations called angels, we would not have known about them. God told us that He created the angels, and they do not disobey God in what He commands them, and they do as they are bid, and they are unseen; if not for this, we would not know about the angels.

Then there is belief in the Books and the messengers. Someone might say, 'Are the messengers unseen? And are the Divine Revelations unseen? The

(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari in *Al-At'ima*, and by Muslim in *Al-Iman*

messengers are human beings, and the scriptures can be seen.’ To answer this, we say: No; none of us have ever witnessed revelation being sent down to a messenger, and this means that the matter of the revelation of scripture to a messenger is a matter of the Unseen, which God knows and in which we believers believe. And how can we believe in all the messengers and not make any difference between them? We say that the messengers sent by God only deliver a way of guidance from God which contains doctrines that do not change with the passage of time, and rulings which change with the passage of time according to the circumstances connected with them.

So, the doctrinal essence of every message remains the same, but the required practical applications in life differ because life’s circumstances differ; and when life’s circumstances differ, the True Lord sends down the appropriate legislation. But the essence is the same, which is sent to us by the Creator besides whom there is no deity. For this reason, the wise words come: ‘...We make no distinction between any of His messengers....’ We make no distinction between the messengers in that they deliver to us from God what all the different forms of revelation agree on in terms of doctrinal matters, and what they differ upon in terms of rulings which are appropriate for the conditions of their time.

After this, the True Lord says, ‘...We hear and we obey....’ Hearing means that the call is delivered, and obeying means that its requirements are implemented, and that the believer obeys the commands and prohibitions in everything connected with the motions of life. Those who wish to separate religion from the motions of life say, ‘Religion is concerned with acts of worship such as prayer, fasting, the poor-due and the pilgrimage’; and beyond this, they seek to separate the motions of life from religion.

To these people, we say: You are speaking about what you have heard about a religion which did not come to regulate the motions of life, but rather came to restore the element which was absent from the Jews, namely the element of spirituality; but the Islamic religion came as a seal of all the religions to regulate the motions of life; for every matter of life and every motion within it are contained within the limits of obedience. When we read the Noble Quran, we find the wise words where God addresses the believers saying that when

the call to prayer is sounded on the day of congregation (Friday), they should hasten to the remembrance of God, and leave all worldly commerce: this is for their own good, if they but knew it (*al-Jumu'a*: 9).

So, the True Lord *the Most High* commands the believers and takes them from one of the motions of life to a different motion, He does not take them arbitrarily, but rather, He calls them to announce their communal loyalty, which is an announcement from every believer of servitude before God in front of all other creatures. And after the believers finish praying, what does the True Lord *the Most High* say to them? He tells them that when the prayer is ended, to disperse freely on earth and seek to obtain something of God's bounty, but to remember God often so that they might attain success (*al-Jumu'a*: 10).

So, dispersing freely on earth is a motion of life, just as the call to hasten to God's remembrance was. In this way, every motion of life is included within the realm of obedience; so '...We hear, and we obey...' means, we have heard all of the teaching. But when we hear the teaching and when we obey, do we have the ability to obey all the teachings of the Way, or will we make mistakes?

Since no one is able to be completely obedient, and we make mistakes, God's words then come: '...[We seek] Your forgiveness, our Lord, and to You is the [final] destination.' The final destination all goes back to You, and You are the True God; so, we servants ask You for forgiveness so that when we meet You, we will be sure that Your mercy outstrips Your wrath. The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَعَلَيْهَا مَا اكْتَسَبَتْ رَبَّنَا لَا
تُؤَاخِذْنَا إِنْ نَسِينَا أَوْ أَخْطَأْنَا رَبَّنَا وَلَا تَحْمِلْ عَلَيْنَا إَصْرًا كَمَا حَمَلْتَهُ
عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِنَا رَبَّنَا وَلَا تُحَمِّلْنَا مَا لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا بِهِ ۖ وَاعْفُ عَنَّا وَاعْفِرْ
لَنَا وَارْحَمْنَا أَنْتَ مَوْلَانَا فَانصُرْنَا عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٢٨٦﴾

**God does not burden any soul with more than it can bear:
each gains whatever good it has done, and suffers its bad –
'Lord, do not take us to task if we forget or make mistakes.
Lord, do not burden us as You burdened those before us.**

**Lord, do not burden us with more than we have strength to bear. Pardon us, forgive us, and have mercy on us. You are our Protector, so help us against the disbelievers' [286]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 286)**

‘God does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity....’ He *the Exalted* only burdens you with what you can bear; why? Because with respect to the capacity of the human soul, there are three kinds of actions: the first kind is of those which we have no power over, and these are far removed from what God charges us with. The second kind relates to those which we have power over, but with great difficulty so that we have to exert our powers somewhat. The third kind is related to those things which we are well able to bear. So ‘God does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity....’ This means that the True Lord *the Most High* only charges the soul with responsibilities which are within the confines of its ability. The True Lord *the Most High* held every Muslim responsible for praying five obligatory prayers a day, and our times are filled with prayer; and it could have been ten prayers since there are people who are able to offer supererogatory prayers. And He *the Exalted* held every Muslim responsible for fasting one month; yet, are there not some people who fast three months? The same can be said of the *zakat* (poor-due) since there have been people who give all of their wealth for God’s sake, not only the poor-due which they are obliged to give.

So, we are well able to bear this, and even to do more. There are, then, three kinds of things: things which are beyond our ability so that they do not enter the realm of responsibility; and things which we are able to do, but only with difficulty; and things which we are well able to bear. When the True Lord *the Most High* gives us responsibilities, He gives us things which we are well able to do; and as long as He gives us things which we are well able to do, if you willingly do anything extra this is another matter: ‘...And he who of his own accord volunteers a good work, shall derive good from it: and good shall it be for you to fast if you know it’ (*al-Baqara*: 184), as long as you offer something extra which is of the same kind as that which He made obligatory.

So moral responsibilities are within our ability to bear; otherwise, if you were not well able to bear them, you would not voluntarily offer anything

more. He *the Exalted* says, 'God does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity...' and after this He teaches us how to supplicate by saying, '...“Our Lord, and do not lay upon us a burden like that which You laid upon those before us. Our Lord, and do not burden us with that which we have no ability to bear....”' And He has already told us that 'God does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity...;' so He *the Exalted* holds us responsible only for that which we are able to do.

It is related that when God heard His Messenger and the believers saying, '...Our Lord, and do not lay upon us a burden like that which You laid upon those before us...', He *the Exalted* said, 'I assent.' And when they said, '...Our Lord, and do not burden us with that which we have no ability to bear...', He *the Exalted* said, 'I assent.' And He *the Exalted* did not burden us with more than we are well able to bear which means the lowest common denominator of all the believers. There are people whose aspirations are higher than those of others; and in the case of those whose aspirations are high, they may perform additional acts of worship voluntarily; and in the case of those whose aspiration is not so high, they only do that which is obligatory for them. And if anything happens to a person to make the ruling beyond what he is well able to bear, God lightens the burden: the Sacred Law says to the traveller: You have left your habitual life, and gone to places in which you are not settled, so the True Lord lightens your burdens for you; thus you may forgo fasting in *Ramadan*, and you may shorten your prayers.

The True Lord *the Most High* knows that what is within our capacity might sometimes be diminished, which is why He *the Glorious and Exalted* lightens some of the rulings of religious charges and gives dispensations when they cannot be borne. An example of this is found in God's ruling concerning fighting when He reassured the believers in one of the battles that He has lightened their burden, for He knows that they suffer from weakness; and so if there is one hundred of them who are patient in adversity, they should be able to overcome two hundred (*al-Anfal*: 66).

Before this verse was revealed, the proportion in battle was one to ten (that is if the believers face an enemy force that was ten times their number, they should persist and fight), and then the True Lord *the Most High* lightened

it and made it one to two (that if they face an enemy force that was only double their number) because there was weakness. In this way we see that He *the Exalted* will lighten the burden of responsibility whenever it goes beyond what we are well able to bear.

Many people interpret this in the wrong way, saying that some moral responsibilities are beyond their capacity. To these people, we say: No, it is not for you to determine what you are well able to bear and then, to measure the responsibility by this standard. Rather, consider whether He charged you with it, or not. If the True Lord held you responsible for it, you must judge that He burdened you with that which you are well able to bear, and all of the responsibilities with which the Most Merciful burdens us are things which we are well able to bear. ‘God does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity. It will have [the consequence of] what [good] it has gained, and it will bear [the consequence of] what [evil] it has earned....’

The expression ‘it will have’ implies possession and distinction, and it means that which benefits and gains reward for the soul; and ‘it will bear’ implies having committed a misdeed. We notice that the expression ‘it will have’ is always used with the Arabic verb form *kasab* (rendered here as ‘gained’) (in a positive context), whilst the expression ‘it will bear’ always goes with the Arabic verb from *iktasab* (rendered as ‘earned’ with a negative connotation, sinning), except in one single verse, when the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘Yea! Whoever earns evil and by his sin is engulfed, these are the inmates of the Fire, therein to abide for ever’ (*al-Baqara*: 81). (Here the verb form *kasab* is used)

There is an observation to be made here about style, since the form *kasab* means that there is a difference in the mode of action between this form and *iktasab*: the form *iktasab* is on the morphological pattern *ifta‘al* which suggests affectation and the performance of an action which requires manipulation. As for *kasab*, it means doing something natural and in harmony with the soul’s original inclination. So *kasab* is not the same as *iktasab*, and all good deeds are done by *kasab*, not *iktasab*.

For example, when a man looks at his wife and sees her beauty, does he have to employ any artifice, or is this something natural? It is natural; yet, when he looks at a woman who is not his wife or kin, he looks around to see

if anyone saw him looking, and if he will be mocked or jeered because of what he did. Why? It was so because he has committed an unnatural act.

Another example: when a person eats food bought with his own money, or his father's money, he eats in a natural way; but when someone enters an orchard to steal from it, he employs artifice and trickery when doing so, and tries to hide himself. The evildoer employs artifice, whilst the actions of the one who does good are simple, with no artifice. Evil is that which requires artifice and affectation.

The greatest misfortune is when evildoing requires no artifice because the one who does it, must have reached the point where his faithful sensitivity has become blunted, and evil deeds become a simple (and natural) matter for him because he has become used to doing them so much. The True Lord says, 'Yea! Whoever earns evil and by his sin is engulfed...' (*al-Baqara*: 81). Sinfulness surrounds them from all sides, and there is no longer any way out, and he does not employ any artifice since he has developed and acquired a predisposition for evil. For example, when a thief first begins his act of stealing, he is nervous and watchful, but once stealing becomes like his vocation, he carries all the stratagems of theft and his sensitivity becomes blunted.

In the first stage of evil, evildoers are ashamed of their evil deeds, which shows that their consciences and hearts still have some good in them; but when they consider evil to be a vocation and a talent, this is the disaster; and their sinfulness engulfs them and overwhelms them, and leaves them no way to escape to God and repent. The one who plays gambling games, or is ensnared by the sin of licentiousness, might say happily, 'Last night was fantastic!' Yet, the one who commits the sin for the first time says, 'Last night was horrible; I wish it had never happened,' and he continues to chastise and reproach himself because he has hurt and exhausted himself by committing sin.

So, the True Lord's words '...It will have [the consequence of] what [good] it has gained, and it will bear [the consequence of] what [evil] it has earned...' explain to us that it is evildoing which requires effort; and if the matter changes from *iktasab* to *kasab*, this is the great disaster, and it means that one's sinfulness has engulfed him. And every evil deed a person does will be counted against him, so, the intelligent and wise person is the one who does much that would

be counted in, not against, his favour; for the One Who says this is the All Knowing, All-Dominant True Lord, with Whom is all destination, so, there is no way of evading this issue. After this, the True Lord states the supplication of His believing servants: ‘...Our Lord, do not impose blame upon us if we have forgotten or erred....’

Someone might say, ‘The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* assured us: “My community has been excused mistakes, forgetfulness, and that which they are forced to do.”⁽¹⁾ So, why would the Quran bring up something for which the Islamic community has already been excused, and have people call upon their Lord to pardon them for it?’

We reply to this: Did anyone tell you that the excusing of mistakes, forgetfulness and coerced acts existed from the beginning? Perhaps the excusing happened after the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and the early believers had prayed for it. As long as they were ‘excused,’ this means that they must have been counted before that. So no one should say, ‘How can you supplicate about something which does not exist?’ Or, alternatively, we can say that this indicates the height of faithful purity; that is, God *the Most High* should not be disobeyed in any way except accidentally or in forgetfulness, and that it is not right that God be disobeyed deliberately; for the one who knows God’s true worth, would never disobey God except accidentally or in forgetfulness because the Creator is the One Who gave us all blessings, and after this held us responsible, so, it is important that we not commit any disobedience intentionally. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* called what Adam did an act of disobedience even though He tells that He gave Adam a command before, but he forgot; and God found no firmness of purpose in him (*Ta Ha*: 115).

And God called the forgetfulness of Adam disobedience, when He said that Adam disobeyed his Lord, and thus did he fell into grievous error (*Ta Ha*: 121). So forgetfulness was originally considered an act of disobedience; but God was kind to the community of Muhammad excusing their forgetfulness. Concerning the matter of Adam, there is something which we need to be aware of:

(1) Narrated by At-Tabarani in *Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir* on the authority of Thawban

Adam was created by the Hand of God whilst we are created by the law of reproduction; and Adam received his charges from God directly without any messenger, and was given a single command: not to eat from the tree.

If Adam was created directly by God, and given his charges directly by God, and was only held responsible for a single thing, which was not to approach the tree, and did not have many responsibilities, what did he forget? And what did he remember? It was an act of disobedience; therefore: for Adam, forgetfulness was disobedience because he was created by the Hand of God. And this is what we understand from God's address to Satan when He chided him for not prostrating himself before what God created with His own Hands (*Sad: 75*).

For this reason, it was not appropriate or right for him to forget this single responsibility. Perhaps our master Adam was made to forget for a wise reason known to God which may have been to allow him to live upon the earth where God had made him His vicegerent. As for the community of Muhammad, when we say, '...Our Lord, do not impose blame upon us if we have forgotten or erred...', it is as though we are saying: Lord, we recognise Your true merit, and we would never dare to disobey you intentionally; and if we disobey, it is only through our forgetfulness or error – and this is an acknowledgement of the merit of the True Lord.

But what is forgetfulness? And what is a mistake (*khata'*) First of all, there are the verbs *akhta'* and *khati'a*; and the word *khit'* can only mean a sin, since it means to deliberately do something wrong, so, you know the rule yet, you break it. Yet, the one who makes a mistake (*akhta'*) might not know the rule, so, you correct his mistake for him because he has fallen short of what is correct.

An example of this is as follows: When you learn in school that the subject of a sentence is in the nominative case, whilst the object is in the accusative, and during the middle of the year, when you make a mistake, the teacher will correct the rule for you until it settles in your mind; however, when the examinations come, does the teacher correct you, or take you to task? He takes you to task because you studied this rule all through the year. So there is *khati'a* and *akhta'*; and *akhta'* can sometimes be unintentional because there is no rule which I have broken, or I did not know the rule, but

rather, I simply misspoke because they had not yet told it to me, or they told me once, but I did not remember, or the matter had not yet, become natural to me; for the student makes mistakes with the subject and the object for a long time, and after this, he matures and the language becomes an innate faculty for him if he is diligent in retaining it.

At first, the student speaks his Arabic sentences without any inflectional endings, but rather leaves the ends of the words without any case ending; and then, when he remembers the rule, he properly assigns the nominative and accusative case endings. Why? Because three rulings cross his mind: this is a subject and subjects take the nominative case, so, it must be nominative; and this is the object.... So he goes through a mental process; but after he goes through this process, he is able to say it correctly even if he does not remember the rule because it has become an innate talent of language for him which we describe as being ‘automatic.’

An example of this is the child who learns how to sew. Look at how long it takes him to learn how to take the thread and pass it through the eye of the needle, and his teacher might need to discipline him more than once before he learns it; and the tip of the thread splits into two because it is long, so, he shortens it, but then, it will not go into the eye, so he twists it so it will go in. He takes such a long time, and then he begins to stitch and it does not come out neatly. He remains like this for a while, and then, he becomes able to do all this automatically, whilst conversing with someone because these actions have become innate for him, i.e. automatic.

When someone becomes accustomed by practice to a mental activity, according to limited rules such as learning a language, we call this a ‘faculty’; as for physical activities such as threading a needle, we call it a ‘mechanism.’

An example of a mental activity is: when you ask a student of Al-Azhar University a question of jurisprudence, he might need some time to familiarise himself with the chapter which contains the answer; yet, if you pose the same question to an experienced scholar, as soon as you ask the question, he will give you the ruling and the chapter where the ruling can be found; jurisprudence has become an innate faculty for the scholar.

The True Lord then states the supplication of the believers: ‘...Our Lord, and do not lay upon us a burden like that which You laid upon those before us....’ A burden is something heavy which is difficult for a person to carry. An example of this burden is that which was sent down to the Jews: If you want to repent, kill yourselves, or give in charity one quarter of your possessions. But God does not deal with us as He dealt with the nations who came before us; and when we say, ‘...Our Lord, and do not burden us with that which we have no ability to bear....,’ we believe what the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘God said, “Yes.”’⁽¹⁾ The meaning of God’s word ‘Yes’ is that He *the Exalted* answered the supplication by lifting hardship from this community.

That is, God will not make us bear burdens which we have no strength to bear. And when we say, ‘And pardon us,’ we turn to God and beseech Him: You, the True Lord, know that however great the faithful consciousness and pious vigilance we are granted might be, we will not be able to give You your full due; so, we can only approach You by asking You to pardon us and efface our sins.

The meaning of the word ‘*afw*’ here is to efface sins, just like when someone walks in the desert and leaves tracks and the wind comes and removes them. It is as though there is a sin, and the sin left a trace, and you ask God to blot out this sin. And when you say, ‘...and forgive us....,’ you know that one of the elements of the human constitution is the intention which desires to turn resolution into action and implementation; and this requires practice from you. For example, when someone sins against you, you have the right to take retribution for this sin; and you have the right to hold back your anger so that the anger still exists, but you keep it hidden; or you have the right to forgive.

But what about such a thing in the case of the Creator Who has Absolute Power? God might not punish the sinful slave, but still be angry with him; and who amongst us could bear the anger of the Lord? For this reason, we ask His forgiveness, and say, ‘...and forgive us; and have mercy upon us....’ We ask Him *the Exalted* not to let us fall into sin which would incur His wrath – God

(1) Narrated by Imam Muslim in his *Sahih* on the authority of Abu Hurayra

forbid – upon us. The effacement of sin means that we commit sin and then ask God to forgive us, but mercy is to ask Him not to let us sin to begin with.

And when the noble verse says, ‘...You are our Protector, so give us victory over the disbelieving people,’ this is a recognition of our servitude to Him, and that He is the True Lord, our Creator, our Lord, and our Protector. As long as the True Lord is our Protector, He is our Protector against the people who disbelieve. So the end of the chapter of *al-Baqara* is in line with its beginning, when He said, ‘*Alif. Lam. Mim.* This Book: there is no doubt about it; it is a guidance to the God-fearing who believe in the Unseen, who observe prayer, and out of what God has bestowed on them, expend for God’ (*al-Baqara*: 1-3).

At the beginning of the chapter, God gave illustrations of the disbelievers and hypocrites, and at the end of it He taught a supplication by the believers: ‘...give us victory over the disbelieving people.’ These words indicate the lasting battle between faith and disbelief, and that the believer always takes God’s rulings in order to combat disbelief wherever he finds it, and the believer has absolute trust that God is his Protector because God is the Supreme Lord of those who believe, whilst the disbelievers have no true lord. And if God is the Supreme Lord of the believer, whilst the disbeliever has no true lord, this means that the battle will continue to rage between the believer and the disbeliever, in that whenever the believer sees a violation of Islam in any form, let him trust that God is his Helper and Supporter, and trust that God is with him; and let the believer trust that God only asks him to respond to His judgement and His aid of support because He is the One Who is always victorious; and He *the Glorious and Exalted* commanded the believers to fight against the infidels who attack them and God will chastise them by their hands (*at-Tawba*: 14).

As a believer, you must always be alert to the actions of disbelief in all their forms; for with its machinations, this disbelief endeavours to spoil the motions of life and to exhaust the world, and to give supremacy to man-made laws. It is also essential for you, as a believer, to be one of the God-fearing people with whose mention God started the chapter of *al-Baqara*, and after this, you must ask God to help you always against the infidels, and this is

the crowning touch of the chapter of *al-Baqara*: ‘...give us victory over the disbelieving people.’

Concluding the chapter of *al-Baqara* with these words indicates that if someone has faith, he must try to share his faith in his Lord with all mankind so that the motions of life can be mutually supportive, avoiding any clash between the guided motions in life of the believer and the misguided motions of life of the disbeliever; for such a conflict will prove to be a burden for the human soul, and an impediment to the power and talents which God has granted to man, for whom He subjugated the entire universe. It is therefore not possible for man, to whom God gave authority and honour above all other creatures, to live without security, tranquillity, peace and a motion of cooperation and self-support so that the society in which you live has a cultural awakening which confirms for man that he truly is God’s vicegerent on earth.

It is not sufficient for us that one of us has belief and then, leads a life that separates him from the rest of the world; for in this case, he will lose out on the motions of life in this worldly life and the infidels will have the upper hand in it. Rather, God wants the believer to make the world serve him as God willed for it to serve. When the believer passes on his faith to others, he will benefit from the good of others, whilst if he keeps his faith to himself alone and leaves others in error, others will benefit from his good, whilst he will suffer the harm and damage of the disbeliever.

So, it is for his own good if all people are believers, and he must try to pass on this faith to others. But other people might be gaining benefit from misguidance because it helps them with their tyranny; and at this point, the battle begins in which the goal of all who engage in it is to gain victory. God teaches us to seek victory from Him over the disbelievers; for victory over the disbelievers is not considered a real victory unless the attributes of goodness are thereby made to take root in all existence; and when the attributes of goodness take root in all of existence, the believer has truly gained victory.

When God instructs us to ask Him to grant us victory, we must do what God requires us to do in the battle, by being true soldiers of faith. We know that when the believers enter a battle with others, they can ascertain their level of faith by looking at the result of the battle: if the battle ends with their

victory and success, they know that they are God's soldiers; and if they are vanquished and defeated, they must have a closer look at themselves; for God laid this out as a matter of faith in His Book – which He vowed to preserve – saying that His soldiers will assuredly be the victorious ones (*as-Saffat*: 173).

If we do not succeed, then, we must look within ourselves: what essential duty of those who represent God's force did we fail to fulfil? When the True Lord teaches us to supplicate '...give us victory over the disbelieving people,' this means that after we utilise the means of our existence from the materials of the earth which was created for us, with the mind which God created, working with it by use of the power which God created, in this case, we will be worthy of receiving support from God because the True Lord *the Most High* extended to us the means of support. He commanded the believers to prepare for the enemies whatever force and war mounts they are able to muster so that they might deter thereby the enemies of God – who are their enemies as well – and others besides them of whom they may be unaware, but of whom God has knowledge (*al-Anfal*: 60).

At this point, you will not fear anyone because God has forces which you cannot see; yet God does not send forth the forces which we cannot see unless we first utilise the means which God extended to us.

When the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* concludes the chapter of *al-Baqara* which is the first glowing chapter of the Quran, which is then, followed by the second glowing chapter, the chapter of *Al-Imran*, we find that this is the order of the verses and chapters of the Quran as we know it now, but it is not the order in which the verses and chapters of the Quran were originally revealed or sent down. The Quran has two sequential arrangements. The first follows the chronological order of revelation, when the verses were sent down to deal with events which happened to the Muslim community in their struggle against those who disbelieved in their Lord, and its education for their souls. So each verse came down to deal with an event; and the events of the world only occur by the hands of men; so, it does not make sense that verses of the Quran would come down to deal with other events which had no connection to what was going on in the Islamic society, or in the world, at that time.

So, the events had to happen first, and then the Quranic passages came to deal with these events. But once the religion had been completed, as God stated that He has perfected the religious law for the believers, and has bestowed upon them the full measure of His blessings, and that He was satisfied with Islam (submission to Him) as their religion (*al-Ma'ida*: 3); it was time for the texts to be re-arranged in a holistic way because they had already been dealt with before in a partial way. When we say that a chapter was sent down after such-and-such event, or that a verse in it was revealed after such-and-such event, and we find that this is all different from the chronological order, we realise that God has in his Book two different sequential arrangements:

The first is the chronological order of revelation; and the second is that which we observe in the Quran now by which God's words were completed for the sake of guidance; and this arrangement is also from God.

Index

Chapter of *al-Baqara* (Continued)

Verse 159	7	Verse 184	102
Verse 160	11	Verse 185	102
Verse 161	13	Verse 186	116
Verse 162	13	Verse 187	125
Verse 163	16	Verse 188	134
Verse 164	18	Verse 189	145
Verse 165	26	Verse 190	157
Verse 166	28	Verse 191	161
Verse 167	29	Verse 192	165
Verse 168	29	Verse 193	165
Verse 169	32	Verse 194	167
Verse 170	33	Verse 195	169
Verse 171	42	Verse 196	175
Verse 172	45	Verse 197	183
Verse 173	46	Verse 198	190
Verse 174	54	Verse 199	192
Verse 175	59	Verse 200	197
Verse 176	60	Verse 201	202
Verse 177	61	Verse 202	203
Verse 178	77	Verse 203	204
Verse 179	85	Verse 204	206
Verse 180	89	Verse 205	206
Verse 181	94	Verse 206	213
Verse 182	94	Verse 207	216
Verse 183	98	Verse 208	220
		Verse 209	228

Verse 210	232	Verse 240	380
Verse 211	237	Verse 241	381
Verse 212	240	Verse 242	382
Verse 213	246	Verse 243	383
Verse 214	256	Verse 244	392
Verse 215	261	Verse 245	392
Verse 216	265	Verse 246	394
Verse 217	272	Verse 247	398
Verse 218	280	Verse 248	401
Verse 219	283	Verse 249	405
Verse 220	292	Verse 250	409
Verse 221	303	Verse 251	410
Verse 222	312	Verse 252	419
Verse 223	315	Verse 253	423
Verse 224	317	Verse 254	436
Verse 225	322	Verse 255	440
Verse 226	324	Verse 256	467
Verse 227	328	Verse 257	474
Verse 228	330	Verse 258	478
Verse 229	337	Verse 259	488
Verse 230	345	Verse 260	497
Verse 231	347	Verse 261	504
Verse 232	352	Verse 262	507
Verse 233	354	Verse 263	512
Verse 234	359	Verse 264	513
Verse 235	363	Verse 265	515
Verse 236	367	Verse 266	517
Verse 237	370	Verse 267	520
Verse 238	374	Verse 268	522
Verse 239	374	Verse 269	523

Index

Verse 270	525	Verse 279	562
Verse 271	526	Verse 280	565
Verse 272	532	Verse 281	571
Verse 273	537	Verse 282	572
Verse 274	540	Verse 283	586
Verse 275	544	Verse 284	593
Verse 276	557	Verse 285	600
Verse 277	559	Verse 286	604
Verse 278	560		

